



WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

WORKING SESSION

October 18, 2012

The meeting was called to order by Chair Rabhi at 6:00 p.m. in the Board Room, Administration Building, 220 North Main Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Comms. Brabec, Ping, Prater, Rabhi, Conan Smith, Dan Smith and Turner

MEMBERS ABSENT: Comms. Bergman, Gunn, Peterson, Ping

OTHERS PRESENT: Kelly Belknap, Finance; Greg Dill, Facilities; Bob Tetens, Parks and Recreation; Ken Schrader, ITS; Lisa Moutinho, County Administration; Elaine Holleran, County Administration; Peter Simms, Clerk's Office; various citizens; and members of the press.

Roll Call

Citizen Participation

None

Commissioner Follow-Up to Citizen Participation

None

County Administrator's Report

Comm. Prater asked why the remonumentation grant was going through the Water Resources Commissioner and not the Road Commission. Verna McDaniel responded that it was going through both departments. Comm. Prater asked for a status update on the remonumentation going on in the county. Verna McDaniel replied that the update would be provided.

Comm. Conan Smith reminded the board that the budget reaffirmation was a very important process because budgets are adopted annually and though it has been reviewed reaffirming this budget had legal effect of passing it. Comm. Prater said he would like to know if what was coming before the board was the budget adopted for 2012-13. Verna McDaniel said that it was the budget that had been approved for 2012-13 with the changes that the board has made. Comm. Prater asked if the budget for 2013 had been changed. Verna McDaniel said that the projections were available but they would not know what funds would be carried over until the close of the 4th quarter. Comm. Prater said he was most concerned about having the sum of personnel costs. He added that he believed that personnel costs had been increased. Verna McDaniel replied that all that information would be available for the board's review. Comm. Prater asked about the numbers of people who had retired from the county and returned to work part-time. Comm. Brabec asked if the budget information would be available before the agenda packets. Verna McDaniel replied that it would be.

Comm. Conan Smith said that there had been a lot of discussion about adjustments to commissioner compensation and he invited the board to speak to him about it. He said that one of the proposals that had been suggested was to identify committees that board members serve on and issue stipends.

Lawrence Kestenbaum said that there was currently a whole lot of book keeping for a small amount of money. He said that if that was a way of eliminating paper work then he would support it. He added that it would reduce confusion and clarify the compensation. He said that it had been a problem when he was in Ingham County and the solution had been to do away with per diems.

Comm. Rabhi said that the stipend proposal was something he and Comm. Dan Smith had been kicking around for a while.

Comm. Dan Smith asked for the Clerk's thoughts on doing away with per diems county-wide. Lawrence Kestenbaum said he would think about it but that he had been focused on per diems for the Board of Commissioners.

Comm. Prater said his initial thoughts had been that per diems were awarded on the basis of attendance and he wondered how a stipend would address the attendance issue.

Discussion Items:

Youth Group Coordination – New Tech and International High – Scott Menzel, WISD Superintendent

Dedrick Martin, Ypsilanti Public Schools, said that two-three years ago the Ypsilanti Schools had worked to create the new tech schools. He noted that the children used technology to use their education in real world environments. Cory McElmeel, Principal of New Tech High, said that he would be turning over the presentation to the three students he had brought with him. He said that project based learning allows the students to be engaged in projects.

Comm. Sizemore said that he and Tony Vanderworp would be sure that some of Aerotropolis projects would issue RFPs requiring that they incorporate students. He thanked the students for coming.

Comm. Brabec asked the students to describe their experience at New Tech and compare it to a more traditional high school setting. Leo said that every year thus far had been different. He said he feels more comfortable at WCC than he would have had he not participated in New Tech. Shelby said she appreciated that New Tech provided more than lectures. She said that higher levels of engagement helped her in college. Clinton said he transferred to New Tech as a 10th grader and it had been a totally different environment. He added that if he had remained at Ypsilanti High School he did not feel he would have the skills to speak before the board.

Comm. Dan Smith said that Comm. Bergman had once characterized this board as the scariest 11 people in the county and he was happy they were there speaking before the board. Leo said he went to Ypsilanti Public Schools for his whole school career. He reported that his freshman year had been his favorite. He said that he really enjoyed his WCC classes. He said that he liked New Tech. Shelby said her favorite class at New Tech had been those in her freshman year. She said that she had always attended Ypsilanti schools. She said that her mom is a teacher and she felt that it was beneficial to understand the teachers perspective. Clinton said he grew up in Westland and he transferred to New Tech as a sophomore. Comm. Dan Smith asked how this program might be affected by a consolidation. It was responded that that question would be addressed in the next segment of the meeting.

Comm. Sizemore asked how these students had found out about New Tech. Shelby responded that she had learned about it in the 8th grade. She said that Mr. Menzel had made a presentation on the class but she had started her freshman year at Ypsilanti High. Leo said that he had also heard about it in the eighth grade. He said he had viewed it as a fresh start. Clinton said that his mother had known the IT Specialist who had talked him into enrolling. The Principal noted that there were still spaces available in the school. Comm. Sizemore said he was impressed by the excellent program. He thanked the students in attendance for coming to speak to the board. Comm. Rabhi stated that he was impressed by the enthusiasm shown by those students.

A brief presentation on Washtenaw International High was given by Lambert Okma, Principal of Washtenaw International High School.

Lambert Okma, Washtenaw International High School Principal, noted that he was joined by Brenna and Dante. He said that one of the things that makes his school special is that it is mission oriented. He noted that his high school was a full IB High School. He noted that when the program started there were only 2 IB schools though now there are 50.

Comm. Sizemore thanked the students for coming and he wanted to recognize them for volunteering on the rec center in Ypsilanti. He asked the principals if the schools ever exchanged students. The principal of IB School responded that they had not but it was something to look into.

Comm. Brabec thanked both Brenna and Dante. She asked them to detail what they hoped to do next. She asked them to describe their extra curriculums. Dante responded that he was in band and played football for Willow Run. He said that he spent a lot of his time studying. Brenna said that she spent a lot of her time in the drama club and math modeling. Dante said that he planned to major in computer engineering at the University of Michigan. Brenna responded that she was planning to go to MIT and major in either biology or physics.

Comm. Dan Smith thanked the students for attending and presenting. He asked them to talk about their favorite classes and home. Dante responded that he lives in Ypsilanti and likes math. Brenna responded that she liked art and chemistry.

Comm. Rabhi said that he was very impressed by the students who had spoken before the board that evening.

Willow Run – Ypsilanti Unification – Scott Menzel, WISD Superintendent

Scott Menzel said that the two school districts of Ypsilanti and Willow Run are struggling financially and academically. He said that both Willow Run and Ypsilanti were running deficits. He noted that there was an ongoing decline in student enrollment. He noted that in a decade the districts had shrunk by half. He said that some of it was due to the decline in manufacturing. He said that part of the reason was that students were choosing charter schools. He said that the second part of the problem was the achievement question. He commended the superintendents of both boards for their dedication to improving the prospects of their students. He said that in August of 2012 the two boards decided to put the consolidation question on the ballot in November. He reported that the state had set aside \$10 million aside for districts that consolidate. He noted that there are ISDS in Northwest Michigan that have consolidated and the only other school districts considering consolidation were Ypsilanti and Willow Run. He said that the consolidation stood a chance of gaining some serious amounts of funding. He said there were some incentives in place. He added that there was a house bill which would place a three-year moratorium on the expansion of charter schools in districts that are consolidating. He said that conditions were right to move forward. He reported that if the districts did not consolidate then there was a good chance of that an emergency manager would take over the operations of the schools. He said that if that did not happen then the State Superintendent would have to intervene because of the size and length of the deficit.

Dedrick Martin said that he and the Willow Run Superintendent acknowledge that there are big challenges before them. He noted that the programs that had been presented to the board that evening were new programs. He said that they wanted all children to have access to high quality education opportunities. He said that most of a child's learning took place between 0-3 years old. He said that he wanted to be involved in early childhood education because right now the schools don't receive children until they are 5 years old. He mentioned that the students of New Tech had addressed the burgeoning relationship between New Tech and WCC. He said that he would like to extend similar opportunities to all students in Washtenaw County. He said that the concept was called cradle to career. He added that he wants to be sure that high school kids are prepared for either a career or university. He said that teacher quality was a very important part of the equation. He stated that leadership was another important factor and that it did not mean at the superintendent level but at every level. He added that a school also has to address the culture of a school.

Scott Menzel said there are some bright spots which he noted had been on display today. He said those programs would continue. He said that if the consolidation was done correctly the district would be able to bring back students. He reported that they were looking at a different model than had been used in the past. He said the support from the government, private sector, education sector leaders is very exciting. He said that if the consolidation passes then ten days after the official canvass than the Willow Run must appoint a seven member board which serves until December, 2014. He said that there will be an election in November, 2014 which would create a elected board to run the new district.

Comm. Sizemore said that he would work with them in any way that he could. He asked if there are other schools that are in trouble. He asked if this was the model for what was coming. He said that there are many districts in the county and the state that are struggling. Dedrick Martin said that there are about 50 school districts in the state that are in similar situations. He said there is interest from the state to see how this goes. Comm. Sizemore asked if the school year would be modified. Dedrick Martin said that they were exploring the concept of balance calendar. He said that the long layoff in the summer is not ideal for struggling students. He said that they were looking into changing the dynamic of how students are educated. Comm. Sizemore asked about parent involvement in the schools. Dedrick Martin said that parent involvement is difficult. He said there are many parents who are interested but for economic reasons cannot be as involved as they'd like. Comm. Sizemore said he appreciated the work of both men in tackling this difficult problem.

Comm. Turner asked about the early childhood education programs. Dedrick Martin said they were examining some of the traditional programs. He said that he would like to see a community resource center so people could come in as a family. He added that they would be looking at traditional and non-traditional ways of reaching students. Scott Menzel said that they had already put in for a grant from Success by Six to leverage community partners. Comm. Turner asked about teacher development efforts. Scott Menzel said that a partnership with Eastern Michigan University was amazing because they are one of the largest trainers of special education teachers. Comm. Turner stated that he would like to be able to work with them. Scott Menzel said that there are going to be numerous opportunities for that kind of engagement. He said that the cost of not intervening is high because kids who drop out are very likely to end up in the judicial system. Dedrick Martin said the goal was a much healthier community over time.

Comm. Brabec thanked both presenters for their time. She asked Scott about the ten million dollars from the state. Scott Menzel replied that \$10 million was the total amount set aside by the state and it would be divided up. Comm. Brabec asked how much the consolidation would cost. Scott Menzel said it was partly logistics, partly legal costs but mostly what it would take is time. Comm. Brabec asked how the \$10 million could be used. Scott Menzel noted that it would be used for transition costs not for programs. Comm. Brabec asked how high quality teachers would be recruited. Dedrick Martin said there are several ways to go about that. He noted that when New Tech had been created they had looked for a specific type of teacher. Scott Menzel added that part of it would be developing a compensation model that was adequate and fair. He said that if the revenues were structured the right way a competitive school system could be built. Comm. Brabec said that there are huge cultural shifts that are about to take place and it is exciting to hear about. She said that one of the concerns she has heard most often is how do you get a successful district by combining two failing districts. Dedrick Martin said that when New Tech was created it could have very easily been placed in the traditional high school but he wanted to break that mindset so he moved it to a separate location. He said that he choose a leader who did not come from a high school environment so he choose someone who's experience was in elementary schools. He said that the New Tech students are the same kids from the same neighborhoods as though in Ypsilanti High. He said that it is possible to structure an environment to get better outcomes from those kids. He said that cutting programs makes sense in the short-term but in the long term it hurts the quality of the educators. He said that you can't expect a different outcome unless you start to utilize a different system.

Comm. Dan Smith asked what happens if the merger does not take place. He asked about the worst case scenario for the residents of the affected districts. Scott Menzel said that if the merger doesn't take place you have to remember that the communities are responsible for the debt. He said that in a similar instance Muskegon residents were in the position of being asked to levy 18 mills on the community businesses and the school was now a charter school. He said that if the new levy is not passed then judgment bonds will be issued on all the parcels in the community. He reported that a scenario like that is the worst case scenario. He said that if the new district is created voters will need to authorize a levy of 18 mills. He noted that the levy is currently in place in Willow Run and Ypsilanti and the new district will need to levy it as well. Comm. Dan Smith asked how the board of commissioners could assist. Scott Menzel said that for those commissioners who represent people in the affected districts it would be a great help if they were reaching out to voters explaining the importance of approving the combination of the districts. He said that it was important to explain that this is how the eastern side of the county will be revitalized.

Comm. Rabhi thanked both men for their presentation. He said that he liked to approach things from a positive sense. He said that what had happened in Muskegon Heights was a tragedy. He asked what sort of partnerships were in place with the teacher unions. Scott Menzel said that in both districts there are collective bargaining units in place. He said that status quo is not an option and that unions have to understand that the situation will change. He said they have been meeting with unions and explaining the situation. He said that he had met with the staff at Holmes Elementary before he came to the board tonight. He said it was exciting to see the staff excited about a new way of doing things. Dedrick Martin said that union leadership had been on the planning committees for each district. He said that this coming Monday there was an opportunity for staff members of each district to meet the members of the WISD board who would play a role in choosing the new board. He wanted to share with all of the staff that this was absolutely the right thing to do for all of the kids in the community. Comm. Rabhi asked when a new bargaining contract would be in place for employees of the new district. Scott Menzel said that it would have to happen in the new year because you cannot bargain with a district that does not exist. Comm. Rabhi said he was concerned about the charter schools that had started to appear on the eastern side of the county.

Comm. Prater commended both men for taking on this project. He said that it would certainly be an uphill struggle. He stated that he was impressed by the information that had been shared that evening. He said that charter schools really do eat into the public sector. He added that he would very much like to see a rebirth of public schools. He said that trying to do this with no additional revenue would be a real challenge and he said that at some point that bridge would have to be crossed. He added that he felt the project could be completed. He said that there was really not much talk going on. He stated that somehow that information would have to be conveyed to people. He commended Scott for his work. He said that Dedrick was doing a great job at Ypsilanti High. Scott Menzel said he has a tri-fold brochure which was mailed to 17,000 households in the affected area.

Comm. Sizemore said that Lakeshore apartments is completely full. He said that they had talked to the owners of the apartment center and had installed some computers there. He said that the same thing had been done at Sycamore Meadows in Superior Township. He said now those two places had space for youth to go. He thanked Deidrick for the time he has spent working with him. He asked if there were signs that had been put out. Scott Menzel said that signs would be available tomorrow. Comm. Sizemore said he would be glad to spread signs and literature as he went door-to-door. He said that he was working with Mary Jo Callan and Tony Vanderworp to get transportation opportunities for kids.

Comm. Turner asked how bonds would be handled for the new district. Scott Menzel said that after three years the new district had the option to merge the debt obligations of both the Willow Run and Ypsilanti School Districts.

Comm. Dan Smith asked about WISD's involvement in the new district. Scott Menzel said they were engaged because they had been invited and because it was consistent with their mission. He said they are prepared to continue to assist and he said they would like to provide whatever support they can.

Items for Current/Future Discussion

None

Pending

None

County Administrator's Report

None

Citizen Participation

None

Commissioners Follow-up to Citizen Participation

None

Adjournment

Comm. Prater seconded by Comm. Brabec moved that the meeting be adjourned until November 8th, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 8:29 p.m.

Yousef Rabhi, Chair

Lawrence Kestenbaum, Clerk/Register
By: Peter Simms, Deputy Clerk

APPROVED: November 7, 2012