

MINUTES

Eveleth City Council Workshop 10:00 a.m., February 7, 2019 Council Chambers, City Hall, Eveleth, MN

Councilor John Rauzi, Present
Councilor Brad Hadrava, Present
Councilor Brian Lillis, Present
Councilor Joseph Koivunen, Present
Mayor Robert Vlasisavljevich, Present

Also present: City Clerk Administrator Jackie Monahan-Junek; Deputy City Clerk Stephanie Friebe; Police Chief Tim Koivunen; Public Works Director Jerry Rosati; Jeff Carey, Eveleth-Gilbert School Superintendent; Noel Schmidt, Virginia School Superintendent, Steve Giorgi, RAMS Director

Mayor Vlasisavljevich called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

1. Proposed Eveleth & Virginia school consolidation

Mayor Vlasisavljevich thanked Superintendents Carey and Schmidt for attending the meeting. Vlasisavljevich asked about the economic impact of a new school building. He wondered if anyone is looking at the utilities. He said that businesses will want to know how this school will impact them.

Superintendent Carey distributed a handout to the City Council with a breakdown of different options for a new 7-12 grade high school which would join students in the cities of Eveleth, Gilbert and Virginia. The plan also considers updating the existing elementary schools in Eveleth and Virginia. The committee is looking at an academy style high school which would provide more hands on learning and partnerships with local businesses. This style of learning would require less time sitting in a classroom and more time doing community work. This is a unique type of school which could be compared to the new high school in Alexandria, MN.

Carey described the process of about eight different committees meeting regularly to discuss joining services between the Eveleth-Gilbert and Virginia High Schools. As the discussion moved forward the committees came up with the recommendation to build a new facility. Carey said that kids in education are changing and the schools must update to 21st century teaching methods. An academy school looks very different than the traditional school. There are small working spaces and large working spaces, but not as many classrooms.

Superintendent Schmidt explained why they are looking at restructuring the elementary schools along with building a new high school. Schmidt said these building are over 100

years old and at some point they will need to be fixed. Schmidt said the school boards could just take the new high school to the voters, but they would need to come back and ask the voters to support new elementary schools in the near future. Schmidt says that if voters say “No” to this school project, the reality is that there will be a bigger tax bill in the future as each entity will need to upgrade their own facilities.

Carey said the IRRRB has offered a once in a lifetime funding to help with the costs of the school. Over the next 20 years, it is estimated the IRRRB would contribute 40% of the 181 million dollar expense to build the high school. The state would contribute 44%; and local tax payers would be responsible for 16% of the high school expense. The elementary school project is estimated around \$60 million dollars to be funded by local tax payers.

Mayor Vlasisavljevich said the problem with renovating an old building is that you still have an old building. He said these facilities were nice in their day, but they have run their lifetime.

Councilor Hadrava asked if demolition fees have been considered. Superintendent Carey said that demolition has been factored into the building costs. Carey said that there has been talk of letting the buildings stand for 2 years to see if they can be redeveloped. The City of Gilbert is interested in keeping their school building intact.

Schmidt gave an estimated breakdown of what property owners would be paying over the next 20 years. For a house worth \$125,000 there would be about a \$200 increase for the high school only; and about \$268 increase for the high school and elementary schools.

Schmidt reported that Alexandria has seen fewer number of tardies and absences from their students. Alexandria community businesses say that kids are staying in the area after graduating. Students become aware of the jobs in their region by this type of learning which allows them to be mentored by local businesses. Kids are leaving the Iron Range because they think jobs are not available for them. In reality, the Iron Range is experiencing a shortage of skilled technical workers. The schools are not currently set up to promote this type of learning. Carey stated that an academy style high school could be a game changer for the Iron Range.

Councilor Hadrava questioned who would decide the school colors and mascot. The consensus was to let the students decide. Schmidt said the goal is keeping education the main focus.

Steve Giorgi asked what utilities the City of Eveleth currently provides to the school. The City of Eveleth charges for water, sewer and garbage. Giorgi indicated, that depending on where the school is located, there may be a possibility for both Virginia and Eveleth to provide utilities to a new school. The City of Virginia has been considering a new lift station independent of a new school building.

The Eveleth City Council would be in favor of presenting one question to the voters in May of 2019 asking voters to combine the Eveleth-Gilbert and Virginia High Schools together creating a new facility at a neutral location; and to renovate the Roosevelt Elementary School in Virginia (Grades 3-6) and the Franklin Elementary in Eveleth (PreK-6th grade). The Parkview Elementary School in Virginia (PreK-2nd grade) would not be renovated.

Councilor Hadrava asked about a time line. Superintendent Carey estimated the site would take about a year to prepare as there are several wetlands to mitigate. After the site has been prepared it would take about another year to build the school.

Councilor Lillis asked what type of impact a joint school would have on employment. Superintendent Carey said they would probably be hiring teaching staff. Superintendent Schmidt said the number of kids would be the same and they would reduce employment through attrition and retirements. Schmidt said that school collaboration is a “superintendent killer” as many times an outside superintendent is best source to work through joining schools together.

The meeting adjourned at 10:51 a.m.