

Summary of Minutes  
Special Board Meeting  
General Purposes  
June 10, 2015

---

**President, Louis M. Elmy** called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

**Superintendent Dr. Bernard S. Prevuznak** led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**Board Secretary Leonard B. Przywara** called the roll.

9 MEMBERS PRESENT: Caffrey, Evans, Galella, Katsock, Quinn, Susek, Thomas, Walker, Elmy

President Elmy stated:

- The chair wishes to announce that the Board held an Executive Session prior to the Special Board Meeting- General Purposes of June 10, 2015.
- THE SUBJECTS DISCUSSED IN EXECUTIVE SESSION RELATED SOLELY TO MATTERS OF EMPLOYEE RELATIONS, LABOR NEGOTIATIONS, AND/OR THREATENED OR ACTUAL LITIGATION.

There was no **Unfinished Business**

**Communications from Citizens**

The below listed Citizens addressed the Board in regard to the following topics:

**TOPICS**

1. Education
2. Consolidation
3. Meyers High School
4. Design Process
5. Internal task Force Recommendation
6. Geotechnical Studies
7. Schools vs. City needs
8. Feasibility Study

**CITIZENS**

- |                            |                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Jack Nolan              | 13. Nina Cinti        |
| 2. Garry Greenfield        | 14. Ben Manarski      |
| 3. Andita Parker Lloyd     | 15. Kim Borland       |
| 4. Sam Troy                | 16. Betsy Macko       |
| 5. Dr. Mark Schiowitz      | 17. Kenny Macko       |
| 6. Joshua Schiowitz        | 18. Theresa Macko     |
| 7. Loia A Grimm            | 19. Robin Shudak      |
| 8. Katherine Flannery      | 20. Joseph C. Borland |
| 9. Councilman George Brown | 21. Danette Bieleck   |
| 10. Gabby Richards         | 22. Mike Johnson      |
| 11. Olivia Richards        | 23. John Snyder       |
| 12. Theron Solomon         | 24. Robert Holden     |
|                            | 25. James Smith       |
|                            | 26. Tracey Hughes     |
|                            | 27. Gail Kishbaugh    |

Summary of Minutes  
Special Board Meeting  
General Purposes  
June 10, 2015

---

Each Citizen who addressed the Board provided remarks over consolidation and the Feasibility Study. Citizens presented concerns in regard to the quality of education, bussing, the effect on students and the neighborhoods of the City of Wilkes-Barre if the schools are consolidated. The majority of Citizens expressed a strong and impassioned plea for the Board to re-evaluate the Feasibility Report and allow themselves more time to make a decision regarding consolidation.

Following communications the Board took a short break, prior to resuming the Special Meeting-General Purposes of June 10, 2015.

### **New Business**

**Mr. Caffrey motioned, seconded by Ms. Thomas,** to authorize the Design Team of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District to prepare Plan Con documentation for the construction of a new 9<sup>th</sup> thru 12<sup>th</sup> grade high school at the site of the current Coughlin High School and for the construction of a 7<sup>th</sup> thru 8<sup>th</sup> grade addition and related improvements at Kistler Elementary School at the Kistler Elementary site, and to authorize the Design Team to update the District Feasibility Study to include the 9<sup>th</sup> thru 12<sup>th</sup> grade High School at the District's Coughlin site and the addition at Kistler Elementary at the District's Kistler site.

### **Communications from the Superintendent**

Dr. Prevuznak, Superintendent, noted that he was made aware of the problems at Coughlin High School and Meyers High School a year ago and he was immediately concerned about the safety of the students. Dr. Prevuznak further noted that for one year he has been part of the Feasibility Study Committee. Dr. Prevuznak stated that he is not a voting member of the Board; however, he (Dr. Prevuznak) has listened to experts who are well versed in their field. Dr. Prevuznak informed those in attendance that this evening he (Dr. Prevuznak) would like to offer his thoughts and beliefs that he has compiled over the past year in regard to moving Wilkes-Barre Area School District forward. Dr. Prevuznak noted that his (Dr. Prevuznak) point of view may not be the most popular.

Dr. Prevuznak, Superintendent, presented the following:

#### **A Review of District Facilities and Future Possible Realignment**

The purpose of this review is to offer a strategic plan, a comprehensive viewpoint of sorts, in order to better convey my beliefs and my values regarding the restructuring, the realignment, of district facilities and programs for the educational betterment of the children who reside within the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. This positional approach is the result of the contributions of many, who have sacrificed hours upon hours of their own personal time, and who have given assistance beyond the call of duty in assisting me with this vision. Much research and thought has been gathered from many individuals who participated as part of a feasibility committee, or a task force composed of district employees and private citizens, or valued experts such as architects, engineers, financial analysts, educational professionals, and construction managers, all of whom believed and accepted their mission to provide to the district the best possible scenarios in moving the Wilkes-Barre Area School District forward into the future. Their opinions, their perspectives, and the cold hard facts that they presented regarding the current state of affairs relating to district facilities, and the possible construction of new schools has been greatly appreciated, thoughtfully analyzed, and methodically scrutinized, in assisting me in order to formulate this plan.

It has been little over a year where two of our three high schools were identified to have structural flaws that could present a safety hazard to our students and personnel. Both James Coughlin and E.L. Meyers High Schools were showing signs of years of deterioration and neglect. Signs that age had caught up to these two grand old examples of a cherished past, in essence reflections, memories of bygone era of days past. Both schools have produced students who have contributed much to society's call for service

Summary of Minutes  
Special Board Meeting  
General Purposes  
June 10, 2015

---

and have reflected with dignity and honor, the academic and athletic nurturing that they received during their time at these schools. These schools have served both the children of our district, but equally as important, they served proudly as the anchors for the community and city in where they are located.

Many factors have been considered regarding the restoration of both of these grand structures. The feasibility study that was conducted soon after the building crisis was discovered, showed that both financially and realistically both buildings were beyond repair. Both cost effectiveness and classrooms settings that could no longer meet the expectations of a progressive educational environment could not be ignored. The realization as the "Cold Hard Facts" surfaced was that these majestic schools were not going to be part of our future.

As the feasibility study unfolded, it was decided that if decisions were to be made regarding the future of this district, transparency and community involvement were a must. Thus with the help and assistance of many dedicated individuals, a Task Force was established in order to solicit responses from both internal and external committee members. The constant meeting of committees, along with advice and recommendations from our team of experts, allowed for the scope of possible building sites for a future high school or schools to be narrowed. During this time many factors were discussed and taken into consideration:

1. Cost of Construction
2. Transportation Considerations
3. Student safety
4. Academics/Athletics/Activities
5. Operational costs
6. Surrounding communities/ Central location

But what became the single most determining factor in restricting the construction site choices was "**FINANCES**". All building sites that were not own by district would constitute the use of additional taxpayer dollars due to the purchase of the property, as well as site development and excavation costs. Empire Street was determined not to be a viable site since site development costs and possible soil contamination clean up would range as high as the privately owned locations. As it became more and more evident that the greatest opportunity for cost savings was utilizing our own holdings, **FINANCES** once again helped solidify that fact. In doing a cost analysis regarding our General Fund and our Debt Service capability, it was determined that the district was limited in the amount of possible finances that would be available to us. Thus it further provided the empirical evidence that building on one of our own sites was the only way that we as a district could address the needs of our students and engage in a new construction project.

District owned land at both James M. Coughlin and E.L. Meyers High Schools had now become the entire focus of the Feasibility Study.

### **Strategic Plan and Considerations for Future District Alignment**

In evaluating all the factors that came into consideration during the last year regarding the planning of a new construction project, the determining factors in developing my belief for the district's future alignment took into consideration 3 valid questions.

- 1) What could the taxpayers and this district financially afford?
- 2) What is fair and equitable to the ALL the stakeholders of this district and the surrounding communities?
- 3) What school would provide the most productive educational environment for students?

Summary of Minutes  
Special Board Meeting  
General Purposes  
June 10, 2015

---

As stated earlier, FINANCES became the single most important issue in choosing one of our district owned sites as the location of possible future high school. In addition to that decision, the amount of money that could be borrowed also established the harsh reality this district could only build one school, not two. With both Coughlin and Meyers in great need of reconstructive assistance, and GAR Memorial High School in better condition than both, it became increasing evident that a merger of the two schools with urgent need was the inevitable verdict.

With this merger as the only creditable and realistic option available to this district, a site had to be chosen after many months of discussion, research, and scientific analysis took place. The following is my philosophy and in essence is a reflection, a combination of the contributions of many. Therefore this Plan, although reflective of my views, was formulated with the help of many thoughtful individuals whose wisdom and opinions are now embedded into this blueprint for future possibilities.

To begin my site of choice for the merger of both Coughlin and Meyers in to a new high school reflected a school that would be centrally located, provide as many educational opportunities to students as possible, be fair in dealing with the concerns of the constituents of the respective communities it serves, and of course the most financially sound investment for this district. The site at North Washington Street in my opinion offers those possibilities.

The advantages of surrounding colleges, a high school that is centrally located and not one that is represent of a specific geographical community and serves as an economic uplift to the city, in my estimation all points to the site at Coughlin. But perhaps the most influential fact in my belief for this location was the geotechnical study that clearly states of the unpredictability of both cost and site development at Meyers High School.

The combination of two schools provides a ripple effect that will be felt throughout the rest of district for years to come. The grade levels that will be serviced are 9<sup>th</sup> through 12 grade students. With size a factor in determining final price and eventual cost savings, this school will built with that in mind, but additionally with a plan for the future. Before this merger takes place much thought in the planning of activities and social functions must be in place to ensure a proper blend of two distinct student populations.

Consideration must be given to the Junior High Students (Meyers 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders), who will not be attending the new Central High school. The need for communities to stay intact throughout this process was an essential component of the plan. In order to keep the South Wilkes-Barre Community as a crucial contributing necessity in the educational background of this new Central High school and address needs of the junior high students, Dr. David Kistler Elementary School will become a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade educational complex. This addition to the school will allow students to stay in a middle school learning environment, rather than having to adapt to a school setting with much older adult students.

The new Central High school and the Kistler addition will begin construction almost simultaneously to ensure that both student populations are ready to begin new phases of their educational careers at the same instant.

Another phase of this plan is the question "what is to become of E.L. Meyers High School and prospective use of that site and facility". What cannot be ignored are its grand contributions to the local community and the potential restoration of a once prestigious and admired sports facility. After the school construction

Summary of Minutes  
Special Board Meeting  
General Purposes  
June 10, 2015

---

projects are complete, the entire property needs to be evaluated for site preservation and potential district use. Cost of such an enterprise could be considered through a public private partnership as well additional funds that would be acquired in the cost saving measures that the new Central High school would create. Citizen's advisory committees could be established in order to help with this reconstructive task.

In time an additional phase of this strategic plan for district realignment could incorporate GAR Memorial High into the union so that students from that school could be part of the Central High school. Students from all 3 schools can easily fit into the new Central High school by utilizing Mackin as the home base school for both CTC students and those involved in a STEM curriculum. If this scenario becomes a reality in that event GAR could become a K-8<sup>th</sup> situation as well and thus the revaluation of surrounding elementary schools would become a necessity.

In summation the merger of high schools into a central location allows for cost effectiveness and drives down the operational costs of this school district. It allows all our high school students the opportunity to experience a new high school with state of the art technology and the selection of a diverse curriculum that may not be available in a smaller community school. This realignment proposal (Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade schools) allows each community neighborhood to nurture and raise their own children in settings close to home, thus allowing junior high school students to be self-contained in a smaller setting for a longer period of time.

Several phases of construction and realignment that occur within this framework can concurrently be achieved, while others may have to wait. There needs to be an acceptance by the stakeholders of the Wilkes-Barre School District that the worsening of district facilities didn't occur over night and the progression and rebuilding of this district will not occur that rapidly as well. Patience and understanding are essential components of this process in order that the end result can be achieved. We cannot continue to exist in facilities that are functional obsolete and deteriorating at a rapid rate, nor can we afford to finance them any further. Our students deserve safe, clean, modern school facilities in order to receive the education they deserve and are entitled to.

At this time Dr. Prevuznak related an account of an incident that recently occurred. Dr. Prevuznak stated that he was in Schiels Market and he noticed a young man who was stacking shelves. Dr. Prevuznak and the young man exchanged smiles and in doing so the young man recognized him (Dr. Prevuznak) as the Superintendent of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. The young man told Dr. Prevuznak that he knew he was the man who was going to make the decision in regard to what was going to happen with the high schools and asked Dr. Prevuznak "what is going to happen to the schools". Dr. Prevuznak asked the young man what he wanted to see happen in regard to the schools. The young man responded that he wanted to be safe and not scared any more. The young man was worried about walking through the fall protection. Dr. Prevuznak concluded his account of the meeting between him and the young man with this thought, "It's all about trying to keep these kids safe".

At this time, Board Members, Rev. Shawn Walker, Christine Katsock, Dino Galella and Denise Thomas, had questions in regard to the Plan Con submission, bussing routes, transportation costs, District finances, changes to Kistler Elementary and the ability to change the scope of the Plan Con Submission.

Jonelle Davison, STA, Tom Wall Director of Transportation, Tom Telesz, Controller, Jude Cooney, Kyle Kinsman and Tom Leonard, Design Team Members, addressed the questions and concerns of the above listed Board Members.

Summary of Minutes  
Special Board Meeting  
General Purposes  
June 10, 2015

---

Prior to their vote on the above motion, Joseph Caffrey, Ned Evans, Dino Galella and Louis Elmy, expressed to those in attendance that they have spent countless hours absorbing the information that was presented to them by the Design Team. They noted that they have reviewed and considered all the options that were presented to them and stated it was a difficult decision to make and the vote they were about to make was being made out of the necessity to do what is best for all students in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District.

The vote on the above motion was as follows:

**7 AYES:** Caffrey, Evans, Galella, Quinn, Susek, Thomas, Elmy

**2 NAYS:** Katsock, Walker

**Miss Katsock motioned, seconded by Rev. Walker,** that the Board petition the Luzerne County Board of Elections to place a referendum on the ballot.

The above motion was amended as the following motion.

**Miss Katsock motioned, seconded by Rev. Walker,** to petition the Election Board to allow the Wilkes-Barre Area Scholl District to place four (4) questions with a specific yes or no answer on the ballot in the upcoming election.

Questions

1. Merger
2. One (1) High School
3. Two (2) High Schools
4. Three (3) High Schools

The vote was as follows:

**4 AYES:** Galella, Katsock, Susek, Walker

**5 NAYS:** Caffrey, Evans, Quinn, Thomas, Elmy

Motion failed

There were no **Communications from Solicitor**

There was no **Board Secretary Report**

**Miss Katsock moved** to adjourn the Meeting.

**President Elmy** adjourned the Meeting at 8:45 PM.