

**Minutes of the School Facilities Commission
Carbon County School District No. 2
US Highway 72
Hanna, Wyoming**

**SPECIAL MEETING
August 30, 2006**

Chairman Marsh called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m.

Present: Commissioner Algier, Commissioner Carrier, Commissioner Ferris, Commissioner Goodson, Commissioner McBride, Chairman Marsh and Director Shivler.

Carbon 2 – Facility Plan

Chairman Marsh explained how the Commission meeting process works and expressed his appreciation to all for the participation.

Director Shivler provided background information that supported his recommendation to the Commission. He stated the Northern section of Carbon 2 has an incredible amount of square footage per child. The Wyoming State average is 320 square foot per child, Saratoga has 407 square foot per child and the Northern section has 1,100 square foot per child. The Hanna High School is a 7-1 2 school and could support 362 children; however, the school has approximately 100 children.

Director Shivler informed the Commission that in 1990 the District had 1,000 children enrolled and today there are 640. He also indicated SFC staff has looked at the economic factors proposed by the District, but has not seen an increase of population to date.

Director Shivler made the recommendation to the Commission that the District combine Elk Mountain, Medicine Bow and Hanna Elementary Schools into a K-12 school in Hanna and add a small elementary school wing to the end of the High School.

Chairman Marsh introduced the Commission

Mr. Bob Merrill – Carbon County School District No. 2 – Chairman of the Board

Carbon County School District No. 2 Board Chairman Bob Merrill addressed the Commission. He expressed his appreciation to the Commission for coming to Hanna for the meeting.

Mr. Merrill commented on the three elementary schools and the Facility Master Plan Committee developed with the help of Frank Locker. He stated that through this Facility Master Plan the committee has made the following recommendations for each school:

- Medicine Bow Elementary School – The committee’s recommendation was leaving the school in the current location and serve students K-6 grade. A soft mothballing would occur to separate the used and unused portions of the building eliminating any construction costs to separate the two buildings. This soft mothballing would reduce approximately 58,000 sq ft from the District’s total square footage. The committee requested the approval of the Commission for the soft mothballing recommendation.
- Elk Mountain Elementary School - The 2005 Project List identified eight necessary repair projects proposed by the District. The District, based on recommendations of the Facility Master Plan Committee, would withdraw these projects. The District is proposing to do in place of these projects the \$1M project listed in the 2005 Project List which was approved by the SFC. The draft proposal for this project was to demolish the 2-story wing and build a small 1-story wing.
- Hanna Elementary School - The 2005 Project list identified seven projects. These projects were put on hold as the SFC noted the building may be timed out. The building currently has better scores than the Saratoga Middle/High School building. The parking lot project has been on hold and contains large pot holes and worst condition of any parking lot in the district. Many people navigate this area during all hours. The Facility Master Plan Committee recommended that the Jr. High School gym remain with no systemic upgrades and only maintained.

The first option of the Facility Master Plan Committee for Hanna ES is to continue as a K-6 as is. The second option proposed is to soft mothball the newer section of the building and upgrade the remaining portion of the building. All proposed projects are consistent with this recommendation.

He continued that there is no support from community to create a K-12 in Hanna and educational studies did not propose this consolidation. He has concerns when focus is on the square footage instead of the educational suitability of a building.

He stated if four classrooms were added to the HEM building it would drastically reduce the suitability scores if used as a K-12. Hanna is a unique community as there are many transit people moving in and out. This has resulted in social and economic issues and a K-6 could better address problems associated with these types of issues.

Mr. Merrill stated that Dr. Basin indicated in his report the extra square footage in our District is not unique to most school districts in Wyoming. However this District with the large number of special needs students demands more space. The District requested that Hanna Elementary School continue to serve K-6.

Mr. Merrill indicated this District has made tough decisions in closing schools in the past. He stated the District believes the recommendations in the Facility Master Plan will address most of the excessive square footage issues but also addresses the educational

suitability of buildings for the students. There are families out there and we need to be ready when they show up.

Mr. Pat Eastman – Industrial Siting Council

Mr. Pat Eastman from the Industrial Siting Council read from a handout that was distributed to the Commission (a copy of which is attached to these minutes).

Mr. Bill Sherwood – Wyoming Highway Department and Trooper McConnell

Mr. Bill Sherwood stated his concerns were with US Highway 30, Highway 27 and the amount of traffic on Interstate 80. The Highway Department uses Highway 30 as an alternate route when I-80 is closed. The interstate traffic on Highway 30 is hazardous due to the volume and speed. There are 12,000 cars per day which travel I-80 in both directions. When this volume is routed to Highway 30, the local residents find it difficult to travel through town. He felt that the buses mixed in with this traffic will put children in an unsafe situation.

Trooper McConnell addressed his concern with the amount of manpower in the area and how emergency response resources are stretched to the limit when an accident occurs. He also informed the Commission that the secondary highways are addressed after I-80 as far as maintenance and road conditions, and this would impact the response time and safety of children on buses.

Ms. Jackie Jones – Hanna Resident

Ms. Jackie Jones stated that she is a coach and a special education teacher. She indicated she was raised in Hanna schools. She advised the Commission that keeping the school in the current state is what is best for the educational well being of the students.

Ms. Jones continued that if the Commission follows through with the SFC Staff recommendations; there will be educational impacts to our students. Ms. Jones made the following points:

- Uniqueness of the schools – The District does realize that the schools exceed the SFC recommended model for square footage; the District feels it meets the best needs of the students with the current facilities. The decision to determine how small is too small should be made by the local district. The education of students should dictate the facilities used. This opinion is supported by the 2005 National Educational report stated “there is no ideal size for schools”. Ms. Jones informed the Commission that Dr. Basin stated in his report to the Commission that “The learning of students should dictate the configuration of the school facilities”.
- Ms. Jones cited several studies which show the length of time on the bus does negatively impact a student’s learning. She indicated there will also be lower physical activity due to this time and distance on the bus and education and

attendance will suffer if this recommendation is approved. She advised the Commission of the District's K-12 plan in the event of poor weather conditions.

- School buildings are to educate children. Studies have shown that small schools and small class size have produced high educational achievements. An example of this for the District is Medicine Bow and Elk Mountain model math classrooms and Medicine Bow being the first school in Wyoming with a master math classroom. Smaller schools have produced history masters for the national tests and our schools currently meet state standards.
- Special needs students in this District are well above the state average. The recommended reconfiguration would take away space of our award winning vocational educational program and special needs students.
- Ms. Jones quoted the SFC Mission statement, "to provide adequate educational facilities for all children in the State of Wyoming". The District felt their children already have adequate facilities and do receive an adequate education. Ms. Jones concluded with a quote from Senator Bill Vasey representing District 11, "The schools in this area are currently providing and have historically provided their students with a quality education. Why should we try and fix what is not broken".

Mr. Todd Heward - Medicine Bow Resident

Mr. Heward stated he was a manager of the Medicine Bow Conservation District and a fifth generation rancher. If Elk Mountain closed today his kids would need to travel 70 miles away to go to Hanna.

Mr. Heward provided his economic reasons for not closing the schools:

- Loss of enrollment
 - Families leave due to job loss
 - Choice to home school
 - Decisions to attend schools in neighboring Districts
 - Families leave due to community deterioration
- Communities would divide and people would move out if there were no schools in these towns and the town would suffer economically.
- Hardship placed on parents and students and all that participate in schools functions. These individuals would spend an extra \$700-\$800 a year on transportation. What is a child's time worth?

Mr. Heward stated there is strong evidence of future growth and referred to the Arch Coal Mine press release. He asked for whom or what are we saving money. Why are we focused on diminishing our assets with so much money in the state?

Mr. Lyle Richardson – Elk Mountain Resident

Mr. Lyle Richardson offered his appreciation to the Commission for traveling to Hanna. He stated he was a fifth generation ranch family in Elk Mountain and has a sixth generation attending school today.

He continued that school success is achieved with parents, students and community participation. The District's rural elementary schools have shown success and the community is passionate about this success. It takes a community to raise a child and this is very evident in Elk Mountain and Medicine Bow. He also commented on the bus issue with the rising cost of fuel and safety of students due to conditions of the roads. He asked that the Commission give the District options or find a more reasonable solution.

Ms. Ada Kari – Carbon County School District No. 2 - Board Clerk

Ms. Kari stated that tax payers made the decision to build these schools and maintain the buildings. The District has collected information to support its version of the five year plan. She commented on the growing economy and the workers moving into the area.

The District has participated in more than one study to determine the suitability of the buildings funded and requested by the Commission. It appears one more study was done in the last few weeks apparently to support staff recommended modifications to the facility plan when the other two studies did not.

Ms. Kari stated that mandates from the Supreme Court state there should be equitable education through out the state. Ms. Kari stated that the community as citizens and local school boards can not imagine how anyone can justify busing elementary age children as young as five years old from not just rural homes but dedicated communities. She continued that to do so places them in a school with high schools students who have moved from areas of diverse backgrounds and who are much more acquainted with ways of the world.

Ms. Kari conveyed that the Encampment K-12 does work because the families grew up together and the area is not a transient area. Hanna is a transient area and the population is diverse and not the same as Encampment. This is the prime reason for the District's higher than average special needs students. These children create special challenges for the District and teachers and the Hanna schools work well with these challenges.

She continued that the MGT study stated that the "one size fits all" approach does not work for all Districts. She asked that the Commission take the District's educational needs into consideration when making its decision. She expressed her appreciation for the willingness of the Commission to travel to Hanna for the meeting.

Mr. Bob Gates – Superintendent of Carbon County School District No. 2

Mr. Bob Gates expressed his appreciation to the Commission and staff for allowing the District and community to provide the information given. He also expressed his appreciation to the community for their support and dedication to the students.

He advised the Commission that the communities have voiced their request not to close the schools and for the Commission to give the District additional time to review options. Mr. Gates stated the following requests:

- Additional time to see what level of industrial growth transpires within the area. If the area grows the District can then work with the SFC in addressing needs of the buildings.
- Additional time to see what legislation may be addressed in the near future for small rural schools. Wyoming has recognized that local K-6 students staying within home communities are a value to the students.
- Additional time so educators, the community and schools can re-shift their focus from buildings and address what is most important - the educational needs of the students. The District has worried too long whether the buildings would be torn down or remain and not on the real issue, the education of the children. The District needs to focus on what is most important and as a team educate the children and prepare them for the future.

He stated the local community, parents and educators in those communities are the most appropriate group to decide where their children go to school.

At 2:35 p.m., a 30-minute recess was taken.

Commissioner McBride made a motion to convene into Executive Session. Commissioner Carrier seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

The regular meeting reconvened at 3:07 p.m.

Chairman Marsh stated the Commission is comprised of neighbors and friends of this wonderful state of Wyoming and they create a great opportunity for the state. Another partner is the State of Wyoming and that the Commission is required to balance decisions between local control and state law which is difficult for all. Chairman Marsh stated the time given by the Commissioners is sincere and they do this in the best interest of all children.

Chairman Marsh continued that after meeting with a representative from Arch Coal he was encouraged by the economic possibilities which may occur. He continued that a resolution to the District's issue today would be 500 families moving to Carbon County School District No. 2 as indicated by the distributed press release.

Chairman Marsh quoted from the statute W.S. 21-15-114; “we are to develop policy and criteria for use in determining renovation, replacement or discontinuation of inadequate buildings and facilities based upon statewide adequacy standards and other requirements necessary to ensure adequate, efficient and cost effective school buildings and facilities”.

He continued that in 1999 the funding for education was approximately \$450 million and Superintendent McBride clarified that the funding this past year was \$1.4 billion. The State of Wyoming has made an investment for the children and for the facilities and other educational funding (i.e. raises for teachers). Chairman Marsh stated the Commission and Districts are all on the same side and want to do what is best for the students and the state.

Commissioner McBride commented on the Hathaway Scholarships and the 2,000 that were awarded for 2006. He continued that teacher pay raises averaged \$7-\$13 thousand per year statewide. Commissioner McBride stated the new superintendent, Mr. Bob Gates, is a leader in the academic community and he expressed his appreciation for Mr. Gates efforts. Commissioner McBride commented on the statement made by Ms. Jackie Jones regarding Carbon 2 providing adequate education and facilities. He stated that the district is doing far above adequate and that for now he wanted to save these local schools.

Commissioner Algier stated she was in agreement with keeping the children in their own communities due to the influence of high school students and road conditions. However, she advised the community that they need to address the issue of too much space in their facilities and deterioration of facilities in their communities.

Commissioner Ferris addressed the busing issue and stated it was a critical issue and would be considered by the Commission.

Commissioner Goodson stated the Commission does not want to tell the District to close the schools and that the Commission won't for the time being. However, the Commission has to consider the funds and where they come from. Commissioner Goodson stated that Districts seem to be cavalier about spending state funds. He continued that the SFC staff will work with the school district to find solutions to address the District problem. Commissioner Goodson stated there is a problem and if the school is not full in the next two years, the Commission will expect the District to provide equitable solutions to address the issue. He stated that the Commission is willing to help, but the District needs to be willing also. Commissioner Goodson further stated that the Commission has a recommendation today from the SFC Director the Commission needs to follow the law. Mr. Shivler is doing the job he was hired to do and doing it well and the District should recognize this.

Commissioner Carrier stated that the guidelines and what the SFC staff does may not be agreeable by all, however, these are the guidelines by law that the Commission must adhere to. The Commission is understanding of the District's issue, but that, in the future the board leadership, educators and communities will need to find options to address

these facilities and other educational issues in the future. Commissioner Carrier stated that the community is unique, but stated all Districts in Wyoming are unique. Commissioner Carrier provided an example of a multi-community district with different economic structures in Crook County School District and how the communities work together. Commissioner Carrier emphasized the need for the District to unite and follow the law with the help of the Commission and staff. The challenge for the District is to come as close to the guidelines as possible and help the Commission. Commissioner Carrier recognized Mr. Gates and stated he is very capable of leading the District through these issues.

Director Shivler stated the state has done extremely well by providing \$1.4 billion for the operational side and has already spent approximately \$500 million on the facility side. Carbon County School District has been well represented by your legislature. He advised the community to recognize what the state has done and be aware that the funds will not always be available from the state. He expressed his appreciation to the District for all their efforts.

Chairman Marsh advised the District that the State of Wyoming has done an exceptional job and all need to recognize this. He further stated the Supreme Court has made decisions and the Commission must follow the law.

Chairman Marsh did comment on the how different the facilities process would be if the Districts had “skin in the game” concerning their issues. He felt it would allow for a better partnership. Chairman Marsh assured the audience the Commission is trying to accomplish what is best for the children in the state.

Chairman Marsh advised the audience that the study done by Dave Teater was placed on the web for all to review.

Chairman Marsh expressed his appreciation to Kathy McPherson for her efforts.

Chairman Marsh indicated the SFC guidelines and statutes advise the Commission to make a decision to reject, accept or modify the Facility Plan for Carbon County School District No. 2.

Commissioner McBride made a motion that in accordance with WS 21-15-116 (e), the Commission modify the Facility Plan presented by Carbon County School District No. 2 as follows:

The current facility plan be continued in force and effect pending further study by the Commission and the District of the following issues; (1) the possible impact on the District with regard to economic development in the Carbon Basin; (2) documentation from the District of the increase in traffic flow and the attendant safety consequences of busing K-6 aged children on US Highway 30 and Wyoming State Highway 72; (3) recognize the District's concept of soft mothballing and take immediate action to remove mothballed square footage from major maintenance plan as outlined by the

Board Chair; and, (4) the District shall in cooperation with the SFC review local school building alternatives and the District shall within two years recommend to the SFC a plan to move district facilities within SFC standards and otherwise be in compliance with the law Commissioner Carrier seconded the motion..

Chairman Marsh stated the motion does address the concern that the Commission is in compliance of the law.

Motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

Commissioner McBride made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:35 p.m. Commissioner Algier seconded the motion; motion passed unanimously.