



Vernonia Schools – Oregon Solutions Steering Committee  
Vernonia Community Learning Center  
January 26, 2010, 1-3pm  
Minutes

**Attendees:**

Glenn Ahrens (OSU Extension Service), Sharon Bernal (Vernonia Economic Development Com), Dr. Ken Cox (VSD Superintendent), John Donovan (Metropolitan Group), Steve Effros (Aadland Evans), Mark Ellsworth (Governor Kulongoski's ERT), Joe Esmonde (IBEW #48), Bill Haack (Col-PAC), Amy Grotta (OSU Extension Service), Sally Harrison (Mayor of Vernonia), Josette Hugo (Rep Witt), Tony Hyde (Columbia County Commissioner & OS co-convenor), Alissa Keny-Guyer (Oregon Solutions), Greg Kintz (VSD Board Member), Scott Laird (Vernonia's Voice), Gayle Lee (IBEW Local 48), Heather Lewis (Vernonia Area Chamber of Commerce), Betsy Miller (VSD fundraising staff), Dawn Plews (VSD Business Manager), Neal Sacon (Portland Family Funds), Gordon Smith (Vernonia Sentry), Bob Young (Vernonia City Administrator), Vernonia High School students: Katy Stevens, Dylan Vaughn, Danny Vandersheldon

**Welcome & Introductions: Commissioner Hyde**

Tony Hyde welcomed all in attendance and reported positive news about the fundraising process for school construction saying that there has been a lot of activity and it is in a "Full Court Press." Mr. Hyde commented that the leadership on the Vernonia Schools project is outstanding and much is being accomplished very quickly.

**Community Update: Bob Young**

Mr. Young reported that the City has several important rebuilding projects and the number one priority is the Schools. Other projects include Highway 47/Missouri Avenue upgrades for the new school site, flood model study with DEQ and FEMA, wetlands and lagoon remodel, relocating Spencer Park, and the Rose Ave Project. Mr. Young explained that the area on the right as you enter town is slated for development as the community health center, food bank and senior center, three important infrastructure facilities affected by the flood. The city is working with Oregon State Parks to transfer the land to the city.

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**School Project update: Dr. Ken Cox, Steve Effros**

Dr. Cox reported that he meets weekly with the school project architects. They continue to work to keep the project within the \$37 million budget. He reported that additional property will be purchased for a better overall site plan. One consideration is to dismantle the existing Middle School building and reassemble it on the new site as part of the Natural Resources Center.

Steve Effros reported that he is working on value engineering reports. The wetlands from the current building site will be relocated next to the remodeled sewage lagoons. He gave an overview of the Natural Resources Center, which will house the school's science and technology classrooms and provide shared space for research in forestry, bio mass, and water quality. Several state and local agencies, universities and Portland Community College have indicated an interest in becoming partners. The Natural Resources Center could become an economic development catalyst for other rural areas. Mr. Effros indicated that Washington Grade School Principal Aaron Miller is developing natural resources curriculum with several teachers. Others involved in this project include: Glenn Ahrens, Amy Grotta and Catherine Mater of OSU; Bob Barker, Marcus Kauffman and Tom Osdoba of UO; Jennifer Allen of PSU; Kelly Marks of PCC; Chris Marco of Rural Community Assistance Corporation; Brent Davies of EcoTrust, Mary McArthur of Col-Pac, and David Porter of Department of Commerce.

**Overall Campaign update: Alissa Keny-Guyer, John Donovan**

Alissa Keny-Guyer gave an overview of Oregon Solutions' involvement to date. She explained that the role of Oregon Solutions is to bring different parties together on behalf of the VSD project. Alissa mentioned the significant involvement by multiple parties in the current subcommittees and invited attendees to join ongoing and upcoming efforts.

John Donovan handed out updates on the "Catalyst: The Campaign for Vernonia's Schools project"

- Development update 1-26-2010
- Case Statement
- Donor information

John Donovan reported that the groundwork phase of the campaign is nearing the end and the leadership (large donor) phase is just starting.

**Bond & Bridge Financing: Dr. Ken Cox, Dawn Plews**

Dawn Plews described bridge financing as similar to a construction loan. The Bridge Finance subcommittee has been meeting monthly in Portland to look at ways to make the gap smaller through "value engineering" and phasing the construction so bridge loans do not have to cover the entire \$24 million needed from the start. It is also exploring private and public loan sources. Tony Hyde said that several foundations may be asked to be a loan guarantor. Mr. Hyde is encouraged by the many "fine folks" on the committee,

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including; John Berdes (ShoreBank Enterprise Cascadia), Mark Coffee (ShoreBank Pacific), Randall Edwards (former State Treasurer), Eric Friedenwald-Fishman (Metropolitan Group), Shelly Haack (Portland Development Commission), Neal Sacon (Portland Family of Funds), Carol Samuels (Seattle Northwest Securities) and Mike Schofield (NWRESD).

The bond sale is moving forward; a resolution to sell bonds will go to the school board Feb. 4. Two types of schools bonds have been considered: standard tax-exempt bonds and Qualified School Construction Bond, which VSD qualifies for. The district will continue to monitor changes to see if there is still the ability to sell those bonds. Build America bonds have also been considered.

**Vernonia Community Plans: Mayor Sally Harrison**

Mayor Sally Harrison thanked the members of the various committees for their work on behalf of the schools project and reiterated that the project is the number one priority of the City of Vernonia. The Mayor reported that the newly formed “Alumni and Friends of Vernonia School District” discussed a class competition to see how many alumni would purchase a square foot of the building (\$250 each). The Mayor would like to have school site information including a map for the first annual all-class reunion to be held August 2010 during the Jamboree. They are aiming for a huge turnout! Gayle Lee offered to be a part of the Alumni committee.

**Foundations: Commissioner Hyde**

Mr. Hyde reported that he, Senator Betsy Johnson and Alissa Keny-Guyer had productive visits to Catherine Mater of Oregon State University and Norm Smith of The Ford Family Foundation last week. Ford Family Institute has agreed to co-convene a meeting with Oregon Solutions for other large foundations regarding this project. The project needs a power point and student voices at group presentations. The goal is to ask large regional foundations before asking national foundations and smaller local foundations. Tom Kelly, Oregon Solutions co-convener, will present to the Portland Rotary soon. Scott Laird offered photos for the power point presentation.

**Labor: Commissioner Hyde**

Tony Hyde welcomed Gayle Lee and Joe Esmonde as representatives of labor (IBEW #48) and trades. Although the school district must follow federal hiring laws, it will do what it can within the law to hire contractors using local labor as much as possible. Scott Laird reported that the current Vernonia’s Voice editorial expresses concern that local contractors may have a difficult time obtaining bonding for such a large project. Mr. Hyde replied that he is attempting to involve small business development counsel to address that issue. Dr. Cox indicated that at the Feb. 25 town hall meeting, local contractors will be discussed and possible classes for small businesses could be an agenda item.

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**Federal Funding: John Donovan, Alissa Keny-Guyer**

John Donovan thanked Alissa and the federal and state representatives on our team (Sen. Betsy Johnson, Mark Ellsworth, Steve Marx, Maribeth Healey and Graham Fritz) for arranging four legislator visits within one week for Executive committee members. The meetings with Sen. Merkley, Sen. Wyden, Rep. Wu and Governor Kulongoski were very productive and all offered full support. Several asked what makes Vernonia unique, and what is our vision for its future?

**FEMA Waiver: Bill Haack**

Bill Haack provided an explanation of the FEMA waiver. There is \$20 million available in an unused (from North Dakota) competitive pool. FEMA grants \$3.3 million per city per disaster. Vernonia has already used up \$3.2 million to rebuild homes and businesses. The waiver asks the \$3.3 cap to be raised to \$10.8 million to allow for up to \$7.5 million for Vernonia Schools. The Columbia County Board of Commissioners, State Emergency Management – Region 10, the Governor and Hon. Wu have prepared letters of endorsement for the waiver. Senator Betsy Johnson called in to the steering committee meeting just as FEMA was being discussed to share the good news that the Region 10 representative had just met with her in Tillamook and had expressed great support for our request. We should know how much money will be released by April. Everyone thanked Mr. Haack for his tremendous work on this; it could be a “game changer!”

**State Funding: Mark Ellsworth**

Mark Ellsworth updated the committee on the recent meeting with the Governor saying that the Governor was “very engaged.” The meeting was scheduled for 45 minutes and lasted 90 minutes. Mark was very proud of the group that presented. The group in turn was extremely grateful to Mark for his assistance. Tony Hyde, Tom Kelly, Senator Betsy Johnson and Dr. Cox underscored the good decision in having both Oregon Solutions and Metropolitan Group involved in the process. Mr. Ellsworth said that Dr. Cox had been “thrown a couple of fast balls and hit them out of the park,” referring to the Governor’s questions on the future of Vernonia.

**Vision for Vernonia: Ken Cox, Tony Hyde**

Dr. Cox said that we will reach out to local economic development organizations to help us answer the Governor’s question: What do we expect out for the future of Vernonia in 25 years? Another priority is to work toward the development of the Natural Resources Center. Commissioner Hyde encouraged all in attendance to think about anyone else that should be involved and who else would be willing to assist in this project. Please let Alissa Keny-Guyer or John Donovan know.

**Next Meeting: Feb. 23, 2010, Vernonia Community Learning Center, 939 Bridge St.**