



Vernonia Schools – Oregon Solutions Steering Committee
Vernonia Community Learning Center
April 27, 2010
Minutes

Attendance: Glenn Ahrens (OSU Extension Service); Sharon Bernal (Vernonia Economic Development Committee); Rita Bernhard, (Columbia County Commissioner); Dan Brown (Vernonia Planning Commission); Brett Costley (Vernonia City Counsel); Carol Cox; Deborah Cox; Dr. Ken Cox (VSD Superintendent); John Donovan (Metropolitan Group); Steve Effros (Aadland Evans); Mark Ellsworth (Governor’s Office); Earl Fisher (Columbia County Commissioner); Fritz Graham (Sen. Wyden); Amy Grotta (OSU Extension); Bill Haack (Col-PAC); Sally Harrison (Vernonia Mayor); Josette Hugo (Rep. Witt); Tony Hyde (Columbia County Commissioner and co-convenor Oregon Solutions); Sen. Betsy Johnson; Jamie Jones (PCC Intern); Alissa Keny-Guyer (Oregon Solutions); Greg Kintz (Vernonia School Board); Gayle Lee (IBEW #48); Kelly Marks (Portland Community College); Chris Marko (RCAC); Steve Marx (Cong. Wu); Catherine Mater, (OSU and Pinchot Institute); Rebecca McGraugh (The Independent); Aaron Miller (Principal, VSD); Betsy Miller (VSD); Dawn Plews (Business Manager, VSD); Rachel Schultz (USDA); Mark Siegel (Sen. Merkley); Debbie Snook (Vernonia Health Center Board); Vicki Walker (Director, OR USDA, Rural Development); Donna Webb (Vernonia Chamber of Commerce); Bob Young (City of Vernonia Administrator)

Students: Chris Bamburg; Bonnie Birkmeier; Tim Brown; Dakota Burch; Genesis Castro; Souvanny Miller; Collin Moeller; Katy Stevens; Katie Wilson

Introductions and Welcome to USDA Director for Oregon, Vicki Walker

Commissioner Tony Hyde introduced Vicki Walker, Director of the Oregon USDA Rural Development Program, adding that his experiences with Walker as a state senator were very positive; she is proactive and makes things happen. Walker explained her family connection to Vernonia: her late in-laws graduated from VHS in 1939 and 1945. After serving as a state senator and then on Oregon’s parole board, President Obama appointed Walker to the USDA post on Nov 9, 2009. She is also a member of the Rural Development Council. Walker distributed a handbook for rural development and explained USDA-funded programs, including loans and grants to communities as a “hand up,” not a “hand out.” The first step for any community is a strategic plan and Vernonia has one; the second is leveraging – we must work together and think of new ways of doing business together.

Community Projects Update

Mayor Harrison reported on projects and Vernonia’s Biggest Class Reunion August 15, which drew over 400 alumni and family members to the community. The City is working on several projects.

Bill Haack explained the Rose Avenue project, which will provide three social service institutions in

town a new home – 9.5 feet above the last flood level. DEQ is doing site review and the key issue is to have land transferred to the City for the Rose Avenue Project. The Vernonia Health Clinic is looking for financing, grants and new a business plan to better serve the community. The Food Bank is seeking state CBDG funds. The third service—the senior center—will complete this social service “hub” above the flood plain. Catherine Mater is helping seek support for a biomass boiler system to provide energy efficient heating for the hub and to increase the local demand for woody biomass.

Bob Young reported on the sewer wastewater treatment plant. The cost is about \$4 million to upgrade – close to \$12 million to redo. Without the funds needed, the City is back to the drawing board to come up with a solution. Delaying this project will impact the wetlands plan that the school had worked out with the City (part of the environmental requirements for rebuilding the schools), so the school district will look into other options for wetland mitigation.

School Project Update

Steve Effros reported that a several month process RFP for contractor will begin soon– to be completed in mid August. Our team will meet this Friday with Army Corps and others to vet and select alternative sites for the wetland Mitigation. This process must move forward in earnest. There is a Town Hall meeting this Thursday, April 29 at 7:00pm. More construction process details will be provided, including how to involve local labor. The school biomass grant from DOE is being reviewed. The school design is being refined. Contractors are bringing forward innovative technical concepts for the project to decrease costs while maintaining the quality.

Private Sector Campaign Update

John Donovan from Metropolitan Group showed the fundraising video, which can be found on www.vernoniaschools.org. Tom Kelly secured a commitment from Sho Dozono to join the campaign committee.

Alissa Keny-Guyer and Commissioner Hyde reported on the April 9th breakfast co-hosted by The Ford Institute for Community Building and Oregon Solutions for the major funders in our region: Collins Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, Oregon Community Foundation, Murdock Trust and the Ford Family Foundation. Miller Foundation could not attend because of their board retreat. Ford Foundation Board chair Ron Parker said he was so impressed that he'd ask his board to approve a 7-figure gift, and he encouraged the other foundations to consider a significant gift as well.

Pinchot Institute Biomass Project

Catherine Mater explained that she was introduced to the Vernonia Rebuild project when she served on the Governor's Oregon Way Advisory Board, assessing potential uses of ARRA funds. Commissioner Tony Hyde, Senator Johnson and Dr. Ken Cox made one presentation to the Oregon Way before the bond election in November 2009, and then one after. Pinchot Institute is interested in how to keep the forestlands in family hands and was looking for pilot areas in the US. Mater has been working on using biomass for energy and as a strategy to keep forestlands in family hands through carbon investment portfolios.

The Vernonia Project woody biomass segment could feed thermal energy into the K-12 building as well as the senior center, health care clinic, food bank, and other business and residential use. Private

landowners would receive 15-year biomass contracts: carbon payments with carbon investments to pay for health care for forest landowners. Kelley Family Foundation awarded a grant to conduct the woody biomass evaluation to meet a June 10 deadline for financing of up to \$1 million, with BLM and Forest Service as partners for the application. Steve Kelley, a Kelley Family Fund board member, joined the President Al Sample of the Pinchot Institute from Washington DC and Steve Mueller, CEO of Wood Fuels International from Maine, at our Oregon Solutions funders' briefing on April 9th in Portland.

Natural Resource Center

Steve Effros reported that Bob Parker of the University of Oregon Community Service Center, with support from Department of Commerce Economic Development Agency (EDA), is working on how to test economic feasibility of these kinds of natural resource based projects; Bob helped vet ideas to rise to the top for economic development.

Dr. Cox presented the Arbor Day tree planting video as example of VSD natural resources curriculum.

Federal updates

Dan Brown, Bill Haack and Dr. Ken Cox reported on the application to FEMA to buy the current campus through its Flood Mitigation Agency (FMA). We have passed step one, the appraisal, which consists of a benefit-cost analysis by engineers, consultants and City – to make sure we do what is correct the first time for a subsequent environmental study. We may now submit a formal application to pursue the additional steps. Dr. Cox reported that our DC lobbyist is monitoring federal funding opportunities for us.

State Updates

Sen. Betsy Johnson reported that the Oregon Department of Energy offered \$1 million for the biomass project. Catherine Mater reported that out of 250+ projects evaluated for ARRA funding in the Oregon process – Vernonia ranked first out of all. Mark Ellsworth reported that after he, Dr. Cox and Alissa Keny-Guyer met with Department of Education Deputy Director Ed Dennis, Dennis agreed to assist in identifying funding.

Student Update

VHS senior Katy Stevens explained her plans for a student lead and produced video about the project. Mayor Harrison hopes the video will be available for the August class reunion. Donna Webb offered to assist with loan equipment.

Next Steps

Commissioner Hyde asked if there were suggestions for others to invite to be a part of this process, and he invited participants to encourage others to assist.

On April 29, NW Natural Gas will host a breakfast for corporate and business leaders at their headquarters. They have been extremely helpful to our team.

***Steering Committee meetings in Vernonia: Fourth Tuesday of every month, 1-3pm**