



Vernonia Schools – Oregon Solutions Steering Committee
Vernonia Community Learning Center
March 30, 2010, 1-3pm
Minutes

Attendees: Glen Ahrens (OSU), Sharon Bernal (Vernonia Economic Development Committee), Byron Brown (VHS Teacher), Dan Brown (Vernonia Planning Commission), Carol Cox, Dr. Ken Cox (VSD Superintendent), Steve Effros (Aadland Evans), Joe Esmonde (IBEW48), Fritz Graham (Sen. Wyden's office), Amy Grotta (OSU), Bill Haack (Col-Pac), Sally Harrison (Vernonia Mayor), Josette Hugo (Rep. Brad Witt's office), Tony Hyde (co-convener & Columbia County Commissioner), Alissa Keny-Guyer (Oregon Solutions), Gordon Smith (Sentry Market), Scott Laird (Vernonia's Voice), Kelly Marks (PCC), Greg Kintz (VSD Board), Aaron Miller (Principal, Washington Grade School), Jim Krahn (VSD School Board Chair), Mark Siegel (Sen. Merkley's office), Katy Stevens (VHS Senior), and dozens of VHS sophomores (American History class) and seniors (Modern Problems class) from Byron Brown's classes

Note: Sen. Betsy Johnson, John Donovan and Mark Ellsworth were filming the Vernonia Schools fundraising video with Gov Kulongoski so could not attend this meeting.

Community project updates:

Mayor Harrison is leading the alumni group to organize the largest class reunion in history in Vernonia on August 15, 2010. They hope to make it into the Guinness Book of World Records.

Bill Haack said that 2 acres of land from OR State Parks is in final negotiation to be transferred to the City of Vernonia. This site will be offered to local community services: a new health center, senior center, and food bank with the potential that these businesses may share a biomass thermal boiler. This will be the gateway to Vernonia and a centerpiece of rural sustainability for the city.

Haack and Harrison mentioned that the city's waste water project has been looking for a long-term solution, but money has been the issue.

Sharon Bernal discussed the community's ongoing dialog with Catherine Mater and the Pinchot Institute around exciting opportunities to become a national model of a "sustainable community." The idea has been discussed by the Vernonia Economic Development Committee, the City Council, and a number of Vernonians with whom Mater has met. Sharon encouraged people to read the newspaper for a good review of her recent talks in Vernonia and to attend town hall meetings to get involved.

Catherine Mater serves on the Oregon Way Commission, which advises the State on how to use ARRA (Stimulus) funds. The Vernonia School Project was one of the introductory projects of Oregon Way, which is how Mater became intrigued with the potential to rebuild Vernonia in a transformative way.

Tony Hyde and Mater made a presentation about the Vernonia Rebuilding efforts to the Pinchot Institute in Washington DC in early March. The President of Pinchot Institute will come to Vernonia April 9 following the breakfast briefing for major funders in Portland.

School Project Update

Dr. Ken Cox and Steve Effros mentioned the March town hall meeting at which the architects gave a thorough update on project, looking at ways to build the best, most economical school possible. Contractors are pricing out the project, looking for efficiencies, and looking at ways to bring in local labor. Oregon Department of Energy has offered up to \$400k in Stimulus funds for a woody biomass boiler to heat the building and hot water. VSD is now filling out the application for that grant.

Next Town Hall Meeting: April 29, 7pm in the Middle School, cafeteria.

Capitol Campaign:

Tony Hyde reported on the bond sale on March 16: \$1.72 first year for bonds, \$1.60 a year after, which is significantly cheaper for home owners than the projected \$1.90 per \$1,000 of assessed value. While taxpayers will only be taxed \$13M, bonds sold at a premium rate netting \$13.6M, which is \$600,000 more for the project than originally projected! The bond still leaves a gap of approximately \$24 million.

After many meetings with the community, businesses, foundations, universities and the public sector, we have had lots of “green lights” and offers of support. Most of these meetings represent the start of a partnership, with specific gift amounts to be determined. However, initial gifts have already been pledged by NW Natural for \$100k and Ann Kilkenny (family of Winks Hardware) for \$50k. The next fundraising briefings will be on April 9, co-hosted by the Ford Institute for Community Building and Oregon Solutions, and April 29, hosted by NW Natural.

Tony Hyde and Dr Ken Cox showed a Power Point presentation, which was developed as a fundraising tool. Dr. Cox asked students to take care of the campus and be a positive ambassador for the project to guests, the first group will be visiting on April 9. He encouraged students to view and visit the website and write on the blog.

Student Update:

Betsy Miller gave an overview for students about their possible involvement for the project.

Katy Stevens, a VHS senior, said students want to be involved. Ideas suggested include: kids could produce fundraising tools such as a video (perhaps as a senior project), power point, brochures, and a website. Students could write letters to donor prospects; post a video on YouTube and attach a Paypal link for donations. Katy will ask Mr. Brown to have meetings to develop a project – such as storyboard with ideas, and perhaps VSD could help fund. Develop and present to Met group and possibly help with actual filming and editing.

Gordon Smith suggested a class contest to raise money: the most money wins a large prize. Tillamook Schools raised \$100k by students throwing dinners, penny drives and going door to door. Mayor Harrison said each city in Columbia County will meet June 28 to discuss what has been going on; she would be interested in a video from students. She said her Alumni group needs student volunteers to

help with Outreach (maybe through Facebook) and volunteering on the day of the August 15 reunion. Next planning meeting for the reunion is March 31 at WGS. They will discuss ideas for fundraising, such as selling square footage and/or bricks.

Natural Resources Center:

Steve Effros described the Natural Resources Center concept: university and nonprofit partnerships to utilize the science “living labs” as well as space for shop, art and distance learning. The group developing these ideas is starting to meet the fourth Tuesday of every month in Vernonia just before the Steering Committee meeting.

State Update:

Tony Hyde gave an overview of the Oregon Way stimulus funds: Dept of Energy and Dept of Transportation are the most likely avenues. State legislature could not provide financial assistance but we are hoping it will in the next regular session.

Federal Update:

Fritz Graham said the Health care bill passed so other bills can move forward, like the Jobs bill. The 21st Century High Performance Green Schools bill is in the Senate HELP Committee, which Merkley serves on and has language that will help Vernonia. VSD put in an appropriations request, which will take several months (possibly until December) to decide. Our federal lobbyist is working with Mr. Graham, Marc Siegel (from Merkley’s office) and Stephen Marx (Wu’s office). Tony Hyde has been talking to staff of representatives and congressmen in DC and Oregon.

The FEMA Waiver to lift the \$3.3 million cap (per disaster per each community) has been approved, but there is much more to do to apply part of the \$19 million left over from the N Dakota disaster. Application consists of 1) environmental reviews; 2) Benefit Cost analysis; 3) an appraisal (which recently determined that \$13.6 million is the base value, plus demolition value for taking the schools out); FEMA only pays 75% of that value. 4) Forensic accounting – subtract from the appraised value how much insurance money we received/spent since the flood. After deductions are removed from the value, FEMA will make the school district a “buyout” offer. Those funds will be distributed after the old schools are demolished, but we can borrow against FEMA’s pledge.

April 2 – Region 10 rep will be in Oregon. Dan Brown will be meeting with her and will ask questions on behalf of the district. Good news is that all parties are engaged. FEMA Region 10 and State OEM (Office of Emergency Management) are working closely with VSD and the Vernonia Community Action Team flood recovery team. The Governor’s office and our federal reps have written letters of support.

Columbia County Update:

In the annual “Needs and Issues” meeting, in which the top ten issues for the County are selected by all the cities and government agencies in the County, Vernonia schools was chosen as the top priority for funding for the second year in a row in one of three categories.

Bond and Bridge Financing:

Dr. Ken Cox reiterated that the bond rate was reduced, so homeowners will pay less than anticipated. The bond paperwork was signed this morning. The bond can only be used for acquiring property, building new schools, furnishing new schools and bond issuance costs. We will explore using interest-free Quality School Construction Bonds, which VSD qualifies for, for bridge financing once we have FEMA pledge as collateral.

Joe Esmonde, IBEW representative has been appointed to the “Reach Code” which looks at how to build energy efficiency into the design. We have been following the LEED building guidelines through the Energy Council, and our architects have given those specs to engineers. Steve Effros will find ask them about possible additional income through Joe’s leads.

Next steps:

April 9: Breakfast briefing for the Region’s major foundations, Portland

April 27: Steering Committee meeting 1-3pm, Vernonia

April 29: Breakfast briefing for businesses and foundations, Portland

April 29: Town Hall, 7pm, Middle School Cafeteria, Vernonia

Adjourn: 2:42pm