

SPECIAL JOINT MEETING
CITY OF BEMIDJI ~ ISD 31
Monday, July 20, 2015
Bemidji City Hall
5:30 pm.

PRESENT:

City Council: Mayor Rita Albrecht, Michael Meehlhause, Dave Larson, Ron Johnson, Reed Olson, Roger Hellquist **Absent:** Nancy Erickson

City Staff Present: City Manager Nate Mathews, City Attorney Alan Felix, Public Works Director Craig Gray, City Finance Officer Ron Eischens, Deputy City Clerk Michelle Miller

ISD 31 Board: Ann Long Voelkner, Carol L. Johnson, Jeff Haack, John Pugleasa, Bill Faver, Melissa Bahr

ISD 31 Staff: Superintendent Dr. James Hess, Director of Business Services Chris Leinen

The City of Bemidji and ISD 31 met to discuss the public infrastructure improvements needed to Middle School Drive and Conifer Avenue for the new Upper Elementary School and the costs associated with that.

Dr. Hess began by highlighting previous partnership successes with the City and various government entities and the hope to be able once again to partner with the City of Bemidji in resolving the cost issues surrounding the street improvements for the school development. Dr. Hess stated they are looking to the City for help in paying for the suggested roundabouts (Middle School Dr.) and left turn lane (Conifer Ave.).

CM Mathews expressed frustration with the “reactionary” response having to be taken by the City because of the lack of discussion early in the District’s planning process regarding the school and necessary public infrastructure improvements needed for the school development. He stated that the City and JPB prepared and have presented District representatives with a draft of the development agreement needed to help direct the development of the school.

Mayor Albrecht acknowledged past partnerships with the school district when the new high school was built, relating to utilities and assessments.

School Board Member Pugleasa stated the reason for coming together tonight is to address how the City and ISD 31 can partner in getting the development completed.

Mayor Albrecht related that many including area businesses say there is enough capacity on the street to handle the current traffic and absent this current development, the city would not be looking to make investments to this road in the foreseeable future.

Councilmember Meehlhause asked about the school district potentially going to the legislature for a change in the law pertaining to flaggers stopping traffic during school dismissal times, and the possibility that the one roundabout wouldn’t be needed. Dr. Hess replied that they are also working on an adjustment for the coming school year respecting how the buses exit the Middle School; and they are also seriously looking at possible legislative action respecting flaggers as well. Dr. Hess also stated that if the law can be changed regarding flaggers, then perhaps the second roundabout would not be necessary.

Councilmember Johnson suggested that maybe a traffic light would be sufficient for this amount of traffic instead of a roundabout. Mayor Albrecht stated that is a decision for the joint planning board to make. Council-member Olson stated that the traffic engineer was very confident that a traffic light in that setting would increase accidents.

School Board Member Long Voelkner spoke of coming together for a common goal and if a roundabout is necessary. Mayor Albrecht stated that the process of making most of these decisions is based on the School district’s development timeline. Going back to the joint planning board with new information or a different request would take time. Long Voelkner said their board has discussed the timeline and the need to get the development done right and not necessarily within the proposed timeline.

Councilmember Olson then expressed that he feels the due diligence is with the school district and that it is a difficult position for the City to share in the cost of the infrastructure

when the district should have done more research in that land and the costs surrounding the development.

City engineer Gray stated there are no traffic issues on Middle School Drive; rather, the problems are with the cross traffic from 23rd Street to Middle School Drive at the beginning and end of the school days.

Mayor Albrecht stated that she has received feedback from City of Bemidji citizens stating that it is unfair that they pay twice, both for the school referendum and then for the costs of the public infrastructure improvements. Albrecht further stated that she needs to be a good steward of taxpayer money.

All of the members of the school board had an opportunity to provide closing thoughts. Consensus of the board was that they all appreciated the opportunity to meet jointly, and that having future joint meetings is a good idea and would like to keep the line of communication open relating to overlapping issues.

School Board Member Pugleasa concluded by summarizing that he does not feel there appears to be any support from the city regarding a financial partnership with the school district, and was that observation correct? Mayor Albrecht stated that the City has not received a formal request by the school district as to what amount, if any, they seek. However, Albrecht also stated that the City does not have money available to invest in the infrastructure improvements at issue and questions where the money would come from within the City's current budget if asked to help pay for any infrastructure. School Board Members acknowledged that a projected opening date of a school would have to be Fall 2017.

With no further business the meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michelle R. Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Michelle R. Miller
Deputy City Clerk