



## Oregon Solutions Makes School Site Recommendation

By Scott Laird

The full Oregon Solutions Team voted unanimously to recommend what is being called the Boot Site, as the preferred site for construction of a new school campus in Vernonia. The vote took place during an Oregon Solutions meeting held at Portland State University on February 20, 2009. The recommended site, at the end of Texas and Missouri Avenues behind Spencer Field, was chosen over two other sites that were part of the Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) Study just completed by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The recommendation from the Oregon Solutions team paves the way for a final decision on a site selection by the Vernonia School Board which will debate the issue at the regular school board meeting on March 12. The public will have had a chance to hear a presentation on the Oregon Solution recommendation and the school board will have heard any public comment at a Town Hall Meeting scheduled to have taken place on March 2.

"It's exciting to finally get to see this coming together," said Siting Committee Chair Dan Brown.

Coming on the heels of Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski's statements that Vernonia reconstruction was a priority for federal economic stimulus funds, there was cautious excitement for the real potential for construction of new schools in Vernonia. "There is actually a ray of hope," said County Commissioner and Oregon Solutions Co-convener Tony Hyde.

Vernonia Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson made the presentation of the recommendation of the Boot Site from the Siting Committee to the full Oregon Solutions team, which was then approved. Johnson noted that the recommendation does not include a particular tax lot, but states "a location within the Boot Site." Johnson went on to list the benefits of the Boot Site which included:

- Location outside the flood plain, and close to the city center
- More likely to be a community center campus
- Utility extensions and road construction would be easier and less costly
- Land use approval is likely to be easier and will happen more quickly
- Site is closer to existing and proposed residential uses
- Possible use of Spencer Park provides benefits

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County Commissioner Tony Hyde, School Board Chair Kim Wallace, and School Superintendent Ken Cox---After the Oregon Solutions meeting on February 20, where a recommendation on a new school site was approved.

## Vernonia On Governor's Short List of Projects

Vernonians have a lot to be excited about, with Governor Ted Kulongoski's announcement on February 11, that he has formed a Federal Recovery Plan Advisory Group, that will work to leverage federal Stimulus Plan funds for green and sustainable projects in Oregon.

According to a press release from Kulongoski's office, the advisory group – called The Oregon Way Advisory Group – will advise and assist state agencies seeking competitive federal stimulus grants by developing grant proposals that include innovative elements that promote sustainability, renewable energy, carbon reduction, energy efficiency and green development.

"I want to ensure Oregon is prepared to compete for – and win – as many of the \$37 billion available in competitive grants to states," the Governor said. "That is why today I am announcing a new public-private advisory group to help use Oregon's leadership and expertise in the green economy to capture as many of these competitive grants as we can so that we can create jobs immediately and for the long term."

Vernonia was specifically mentioned by the Governor as one of three projects he would support for funding in Oregon during the question and answer period after his initial announcement of the formation of the advisory group.

Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde was enthusiastic about the potential outcomes for Vernonia projects.

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Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde (second from left) was in attendance when Governor Ted Kulongoski mentioned Vernonia as a potential project for Federal Economic Stimulus Funds. The Governor and State Representative Brad Witt chat about the Governor's announcement."

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## Vernonia Flood Stories: Part IV -- Our Schools

By Scott Laird

The Flood of 2007 has had a tremendous impact on the community of Vernonia. And it has been felt nowhere more deeply than at the Vernonia School District. Major decisions had to quickly be made that included sending students across the county to Scappoose HS immediately after the flood, to installing modular class rooms for students, to repairing and re-opening the gymnasium this past fall. When Governor Ted Kulongoski named Vernonia Schools an Oregon Solutions Project, serious help was brought on-board to assist the district in its rebuilding effort. Partners and outside help have been recruited, and the community and school district have tried to rally around their students. In this last installment of the Vernonia's Voice series, "Vernonia Flood Stories," we take a look at Vernonia's schools-- what happened during the flood, during the last year, and what the future holds for this lynchpin in our small rural community.

### Dr. Ken Cox-Thrown into the Deep End

Vernonia Schools Superintendent Dr. Ken Cox arrived in Vernonia, and before really getting a chance to get his feet wet-- well, he literally got his feet wet. Cox arrived in Vernonia in the fall of 2006. It was his first Superintendent posting. But before he had really gotten settled, the community was hit by the flood of December, 2007, leaving him in the unenviable position of having to deal with a major disaster that directly affected all three of his school buildings and the administration office. The day of the flood, Cox was inside the Vernonia Middle School, wading through knee-deep and rising water, helping to save food and try to salvage any supplies and equipment. Because of the surprise element, not much was moved quickly enough, or high enough, and the damage was severe.

As the community immediately began the long chore of clean-up and recovery, Cox, with the school board, quickly made the decision to bus students across the mountain, in winter weather, to Scappoose, where they were able to continue classroom education, sports activities, and to some degree, resume a normal student life.

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Vernonia Superintendent Ken Cox, as part of the Vernonia high school is demolished