

47J Budget Committee convenes

Vernonia School District Budget Committee met on March 31 with board Chairman Jim Krahn saying that the process should be much less painful this year because "we won't be cutting" things from the budget. Krahn explained that the process used by the board for resolving school issues, including the budget, is to form committees that accomplish the work and/or make decisions and then present their recommendations to the board for action.

Funderburg told the committee that there is neither a minimum nor a maximum number of meetings. Since about 87 percent of the district expenditures are in salaries and benefits, the committee can effect changes in only a small portion of the budget.

Though new committee member Tammy Jennings was assured that the committee would have a chance to review the document, Funderburg also said that the budget message and document would be delivered at the May 5 meeting and said several times that he hoped the committee would only need one meeting. This was the procedure used last year, when the committee approved the budget on the same night it was presented, much to the distress of some committee members who felt they should first have read it.

Funderburg explained that the Budget Assistance Team (BAT) would review the budget in detail with the administrative

team. Though materials presented to committee members describe a process where the budget is reviewed fund by fund, in Vernonia most of this work is done by the BAT. Funderburg and Krahn urged committee members to attend BAT meetings, even if not on the committee. They also asked that requests for additional information be presented before May 5 so the information can be prepared for the meeting. Committee members can discuss the budget with each other as long as a majority is not present, which would violate public meeting law.

BAT is composed of up to three board members and three community members of the budget committee and does not constitute a quorum. The BAT will meet Tuesday, April 12, at 6:00 pm. Krahn, Cari Levenseller and Gienah Cheney will represent the board with assistance from new committee members Willow Burch and Ernie Smith.

Two members of the committee, Rick Gwin and Cindy Naillon, have resigned. It will be up to the board to decide whether to fill these positions.

Funderburg emphasized that the purpose of the budget committee is not to establish or eliminate specific programs but to review the document as a whole. The budget message will be delivered May 5 and the committee can approve the budget at that time or set another meeting. All meetings are open to the public.

Decaying plumbing threatens WGS

Spring Break is a time for much-needed maintenance in schools, but John Lewis, maintenance supervisor in Vernonia, found an unpleasant surprise under the floor at Washington Grade School. When he uncovered the drain pool in the boiler room, it was full of soapy water – and there is no soap in the boiler. District Superintendent Mike Funderburg immediately called an emergency meeting of the board, held March 24th.

Funderburg was concerned that the health department would shut down food services at WGS. Fortunately, after a prompt visit by Mark Edington, Environmental Services officer for the Columbia County Health Department, the kitchen can remain open for the remainder of the school year by limiting the amount of water used. According to Edington, it is not a dangerous situation because there is no indication of back-up of any kind, into sinks or other plumbing.

After convening in the boardroom, Funderburg, Lewis and board members Jim Krahn, Randy Hansen, Gienah Cheney and Phil Doyle, and others toured WGS, where Funderburg explained the situation. In the boiler room, which is between the boys' and girls' locker rooms, Funderburg showed the group the boiler drain basin, still with considerable gray-water in it despite the best efforts of a sump pump.

Funderburg and Lewis found a copy of 1956 remodeling work at the school, but there were no sewer lines drawn on the plans. Jeff Burch, from the Vernonia Public Works Department, was able to help locate three separate lines running into the sewer main beneath Bridge Street. This separation of lines limited the problem area to the central spine underneath the offices and gymnasium. Potential damage to the water system is limited to the basement because the main water supply comes from above the problem area. Attempting to locate the drain line between the main kitchen drain, the boiler room basin and the sewer line, Lewis consulted available plans, then jackhammered through the cement floor in the girls' locker room at the location indicated. On the third attempt, he located the line underneath the wall between the locker room and the boiler room. Fortunately, there was no evidence of leakage.

Moving on into the kitchen itself, Funderburg explained that all of the gray water in the kitchen drains into a single central drain. With the grate removed, he demonstrated how a wooden dowel could be easily pushed many inches into what feels like very soft muck under the concrete floor.

After Coffey Laboratories Inc. tested the water supply in the kitchen sink, faculty lounge and custodial room, the preliminary results reported to the district by phone on Friday were

that the water supply was safe. The final results were the same, with all samples showing an absence of all coliforms: "The results were negative. No further action is needed until the next sampling event."

To protect the district from any potential liability, and to ensure that the health of employees, students and patrons is protected, Funderburg proposed limiting the use of water in the kitchen by not using the dishwasher, or other appliances that require large amounts of water, especially the steam kettle. Trays and other necessary dishes and pots will be hand washed. Some hot food, of the heat-and-eat variety, will still be served on disposable plates for the 50, or so, school days left in the year.

Board Chairman Krahn put the situation well when he said, "It would be a little naive to think that this is the only problem." Lewis had brought a corroded pipe to the January board meeting as evidence of the decay of the water system. Due to the lack of accurate plans and the solid concrete construction of the basement, it is impossible to know what is happening underneath without incurring significant costs.

The new middle school building will include a cafeteria to replace the cafeteria in the basement of WGS. Funderburg told the board that he "didn't know why the board would spend one more nickel on resolving the problem."

Council meeting schedule changed

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maintenance of city trees. Council indicated that they would like to re-establish a tree board including public works, an arborist, council and community members.

The Council's regular business meeting begins at 7:30 on the second Tuesday of every month. They have been holding a second meeting, but that will be suspended in order to concentrate on developing the 2005-2006 budget.

Councilors have accepted responsibility for reviewing at least one of the city's funds for presentation during the budget process. Lyda, Andrews and

Heidi Duckworth will review the general fund and system development fund.

Edison will handle the water funds (including the debt and depreciation funds), Biehl will review the Street & Road Fund and the Traffic Impact fund. Branstire will handle the library fund and Andrews will cover park expenses. A park fund does not exist yet, but a budget for parks is included in the general fund.

An executive session has been scheduled before the next meeting to discuss possible litigation with Arbor Village Homeowners Association.

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