

School District of Borough of Morrisville  
Morrisville, Pennsylvania

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 6, 2010 AGENDA MEETING

The monthly agenda meeting of the School District of Borough of Morrisville was held in the Morrisville Intermediate/Senior High School LGI on Wednesday, December 6, 2010. Mr. Hellmann called the meeting to order at 7:44 pm. The first order of business was the Pledge of Allegiance.

Board Members Present: Messrs. Buckman, DeWilde, Radosti, Stout and Hellmann. Mrs. Heater, Mrs. Mihok and Mrs. Ruthrauff. Michael G. Fitzpatrick, Esq., Solicitor. Quorum Present.

Absent: Mrs. Worob.

Administration Present: Mr. Ferrara, Acting Superintendent; Mr. DeAngelo, Business Administrator; Mr. Harm, Acting Secondary Principal.

Others Present: Members of the Public.

*There was no public comment this evening.*

AGENDA ITEMS:

MOEF Report – Acme/Giant cards

Infrastructure

- Approval of contractor listing
- Approval of Act 77 Lighting Project PHM

Approval – Human Resource Items

- Extension of Child Rearing Leave for Cher Tabit
- Grant Tenure – Christie Nemeth and Sandra Sims
- Appoint Stephanie Greenberg as paraprofessional
- Appoint Sue Stetler as mentor for Summer Branche
- Approve Aesop per diem substitutes
- Approve consultant agreement for Erica Waller-Hill (grant funded)
- Approve new hires for Century 21
- Accept resignation of Jim Gober from position of football coach

Approval – Business/Financial Items

- November 2010 Treasurer Report  
*Since the monthly Treasurer Report is provided to the Board, Mr. DeAngelo asked if the Board wanted to continue receiving bank reconciliations. Mrs. Mihok stated that a quarterly accounting would suffice.*
- November 2010 Investment Report
- 2010-2011 budget transfers
- 2009-10 auditor report – *Carl Hogan will present at the 12/15 meeting*
- Acceptance of donation from Morrisville-Yardley Rotary
- Disposal of excess items
- Payment of bills

Approval – Educational Items

- Approval waiver for student X for disciplinary reasons  
*Mr. Ferrara recommended an executive session take place prior to 12/15 to discuss this item*

Approval – Policies

- Second reading of #126 – Class Size

New Business

- Contract with Interquest Canine
- Insurance 1<sup>st</sup> look 15.5%
- Mr. DeAngelo advised there is a possibility that a resignation agreement may be added to next week's agenda.

Mr. Buckman presented Mr. Hellmann with the auditor report from Bucks County Technical HS.

Mr. DeWilde confirmed that items will be grouped by category when presented for vote.

The Superintendent's Advisory meeting has been re-scheduled to December 7<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Hellmann read a portion of a newspaper article published in the Pittsburgh Post Gazette on November 21<sup>st</sup>. The article references the benefits of recent renovations at the Morrisville Schools vs. new construction. A copy of that article is attached as Addendum A.

Mr. Ferrara advised that he recently received a call from a Superintendent in the western part of the state who also read this article. He was inquiring how we managed to achieve these savings.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:58 pm by a unanimous voice vote.

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William Hellmann, President

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Marlys Mihok, Secretary

## Start cutting here, Gov. Corbett

Pennsylvania's PlanCon program encourages school districts to overbuild, argues Pottstown School Board member THOMAS HYLTON

Sunday, November 21, 2010

With a pledge not to raise taxes, and facing an enormous budget deficit, Gov.-elect Tom Corbett needs billions of dollars in spending cuts. Let me offer some low-hanging fruit: Eliminate the school construction subsidy program called PlanCon.

Each year, Pennsylvania school districts spend more than a billion dollars on school construction, with hundreds of millions reimbursed by the state. The subsidy depends on the wealth of the district, but some districts receive 25 percent or more of construction costs.

In theory, PlanCon encourages school districts to build and maintain top-quality facilities. In practice, PlanCon rewards districts for abandoning or demolishing perfectly good buildings and replacing them with lavish facilities that do little to improve learning but take decades to pay off.

Moreover, many of these projects exacerbate a decades-long trend of closing neighborhood schools and replacing them with large consolidated schools to which all students must be bused. Statewide, school busing now costs \$1.2 billion annually -- half of it subsidized by the state -- and riding rather than walking contributes to childhood obesity. Meanwhile, the loss of nearby schools accelerates the decline of older neighborhoods.

Even when existing schools are retained, PlanCon adds unnecessary millions to construction costs by requiring that schools be completely renovated -- a process known as "shut-it-and-gut-it." The state provides no subsidies for on-going maintenance, such as replacing a roof, installing new wiring, or replacing plumbing and heating systems.

Instead, PlanCon provides an incentive for school districts to let buildings deteriorate so badly that reconstruction or replacement -- subsidized by the state -- seems necessary. Architects are paid a percentage of total construction costs, so they have a financial incentive to make projects as extensive as possible rather than promote cost-effective solutions.

Consider the Carlynton School District in Allegheny County, one of the smallest and most heavily taxed districts in the state. Carlynton is currently pondering a number of options to renovate or replace its two aging elementary schools. The district's architect has completed a lengthy feasibility study which concludes the schools are structurally sound, but their mechanical systems are worn out.

The architect has provided 10 options, ranging in cost from \$28 million to \$52 million. They include renovating the existing schools, adding to one and closing another, or replacing both schools with a new one.

But the most cost-effective solution isn't even mentioned: simply replacing the roofs, wiring, windows, lighting and mechanical systems without gutting the buildings. This option would likely cost a third of any other proposal.

At the other end of the state, in Bucks County, the tiny Morrisville School District has done just that. Like Carlynton, Morrisville has two elementary schools and an intermediate-high school. The buildings had all been terribly neglected, and the district's architect recommended replacing all three with a new K-12 building costing \$35 million.

However, a new board was voted into office, with a certified public accountant as president. Rather than build a new school, or gut the existing buildings, the new board simply replaced the heating systems, windows, much of the wiring and plumbing, and some ceiling and floor tiles. The elementary school was air conditioned, as were selected areas of the intermediate-senior high school.

By making better use of existing space, Morrisville was able to close one elementary school by enlarging the other school with eight modulars, which it hopes to gradually eliminate. Morrisville has now extended the life of two schools for at least 20 years, and greatly increased their energy efficiency, at a cost of \$8 million -- a quarter of the price of the proposed new school. Both schools are within walking distance of their students.

The state provided no subsidy towards Morrisville's thrifty solution. Had Morrisville opted to build a new \$35 million school, however, the state would have provided \$5 million toward the project.

Schools are typically among the most solidly constructed buildings in any community. Despite evolving technologies, the way we arrange our classrooms, hallways, gymnasiums and auditoriums hasn't fundamentally changed.

In fact, architectural fads like the "open plan" schools of the 1970s are the most likely to become obsolete. Building green? The "greenest" school is the one that's already been built.

New technologies like Smart Boards and mobile computer labs can be creatively accommodated in traditional buildings. Yet many school administrators contend that new construction is necessary to provide a 21st-century education.

Unfortunately, school boards rarely have the knowledge or confidence to challenge architects and administrators who push for elaborate projects, and big-spending districts continually raise the bar for everyone else. Ironically, many older buildings that are closed as inadequate are then sold and converted to charter schools or private schools.

When it comes to public schools, Gov.-elect Corbett has more than a spending problem, he has a culture problem. PlanCon reinforces the conventional wisdom that newer and bigger facilities are essential to a quality education. They aren't, and abolishing PlanCon can send a powerful message that we have entered an era of limited resources. We must make better use of what we have.

Thomas Hylton is author of "Save Our Land, Save Our Towns" and host of the public television documentary "Saving Pennsylvania."

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