

School Advisory Committee  
May 28, 2008

## Meeting Minutes

**Member Attendance:** Charles Jeter, Becky Finger, Laurie Gillmore, Neal Howes, Joe McCourt, Rhonda Lennon

Comm. Jeter Called the Meeting to Order

**Member Comments:** the group commended Todd Bowland on the work he did to summarize data provided to the group recently by CMS staff.

**Agenda Changes:** none.

Agenda unanimously approved.

### Public Comments, Requests or Presentations:

#### **A. Presentation from Huntersville Police Department on reducing drug use in schools.**

Chief Potter told the committee that perceptions sometimes create larger problems. He did not think that undercover officers were the best approach – they were used in the 70s and 80s but not in the 90s and 2000s as kids are more sophisticated and undercover cases are difficult to prosecute don't result in large cases. Undercover officers often become targets of accusations. Undercover cases usually wind up with small amounts of trafficking, which are difficult to prosecute.

School Resource Officers (SRO) in attendance outlined some of the things being done to address problems like adding more cameras in the parking lot at Hopewell. They also work with the kids and security associates to identify issues. Due to the size and randomness of the activity, they said its hard to identify one specific drug problem. Due to the size of the schools, both SRO's in attendance said additional officer/security associates could be used at the two high schools. Officer Dunker told the group that North Meck needed to update their camera system but having two officers at the school has helped a lot. Dunker also stated that CMS is being proactive with gangs by not letting members wear specific colors. They've seen some issues with graffiti in middle school (Alexander specifically – close to 65% live south of Eastfield Road, the hope is the opening of Ridge Road Elementary will alleviate some of those issues). Furthermore, officers told the committee that there were no real problems in the elementary schools. One of the officers told the committee as he was wrapping up that he'd feel safe enough to send his child to Hopewell.

Chief Potter expressed some concerns as it relates to the new Bailey Road High School and how CMS draws attendance zones. He said he's concerned how that will change attendance zones at Hopewell in particular since there are no other schools but West

Charlotte and West Meck, adding that North Meck has the new Mallard Creek High School to relieve it.

## **B. Presentation of Huntersville School System Concept – Comm. Jeter**

Jeter told the committee that he did not believe CMS can solve our problems – that the situation will get worse over time, not better and that we'd see more fights at the County Commission level at District 1 and the School Board. Jeter said it (CMS) will get so bad that more people will say we need to take control of our own destiny – 135,000 students led by 2 political bodies – one controlling funding/ one controlling operating, elected in different years.

Finger said the data Todd (Bowland) put together – CMS has its own numbers and know which schools will be impacted, we need to educate other folks in other at large districts, we're gearing up a conversation and have the groundwork, adding that it is almost impossible to go to the NCGA (North Carolina General Assembly) and all their processes –the schools are serving more than just Huntersville, CMS won't sell us the schools, it will be very expensive. The only logical way would be to have the 3 towns together, advocate or find other political advocates in other communities.

Jeter said if we do this, we need north Mecklenburg. Jeter added its a lot easier to live within CMS but that this is an option. Finger said a complete legal rendering from the State governing schools – the state said 1 district, 1 county – is also necessary.

Jeter said the easiest way to get this accomplished is a lawsuit for inability to educate our children.

Finger told the committee to look at the percent over capacity and overcrowding, test scores won't bear that (inability to educate) out. The better estimate is dollars per pupil. Ocvercrowding relates to discipline, learning. Research shows that at 120% of capacity, there is a downtown in performance unless certain demographics are high.

Jeter said that CMS has no authority, the County gives authorization.

McCourt asked if we had our own school system, could we mandate random drug testing? Finger said they'd have to comply with Juvenile Justice laws and consider special needs. McCourt replied they do it in private schools, parents sign away.

Lennon told the committee some of the issues with where schools are had to do with where it was convenient to put them for bussing (which they did until 2001) but things are changing. Finger and Lennon told the group they'd never had an at large school board member or major CMS employee live north of Exit 18. The mentality stopped there and the bulk of our NCGA is the same way – we need to find candidates to represent us – who are not protagonists. Lennon said the work they've seen from Raible didn't exist 4 years ago – the conversation didn't even exist. A lot of new projects pushed into funding...County will never fund 100%

Gillmore replied: on paper, looks good but we're still overcrowded. CMS is too large to successfully and positively impact the Town of Huntersville

Jeter asked the committee what they wanted to do going forward since there was talk of involving the other towns and a limited number of committee members were present. McCourt said we could table this and think about it?

Jeter asked do we put it on the back burner, move forward and if we do it, do we want to move forward as one town or as a three town effort?

Lennon said she was against spending a lot of time on something that the committee cannot make a lot of change on. She said she's been up there 5 times lobbying for more money – know how they look at you when you tell them where you're from.

Finger said its somewhat disingenuous to say we want to work with you but we're looking to get rid of you too (CMS). Jeter replied: Its fair to let them know we're not beholden to anyone. If they are not willing to fix the problem, we'll seek alternate action.

Jeter said Raleigh hates Charlotte, they could use this to stick it to them. Lennon said they hate Mecklenburg County, not Charlotte. Finger added that they're more worried about Wake County doing this (allowing it in Mecklenburg would open that door).

**McCourt asked: Do we want to have a non-binding conversation with Cornelius on this? → Motion was made to put this on the next agenda – Vote 5-0 (Howes and Lennon absent counted as yes vote under rules of procedure).**

Jeter said he's talked to all leaders in the State Senate/House – Storm, Basnight, Hackney, etc. personally about this and that we need to go through a process and present it to the town board.

Finger said she'd support a private fundraising activity to have a complete legal rendering to show where the laws are with us and against us (regs, DPI, etc.) so we know where the legal roadblocks are. Jeter said they could use the Town Board to put money forward – clearly take an aggressive stance, private money is more under the radar (estimated cost \$5,000).

Finger suggested waiting to see where we are in the bond referendum (2009) – one year. McCourt replied If we wait, then when? He said he feared this would delay us doing this for a year, adding he's seen enough. Jeter said if we move forward now, forces CMS' hand, come bond referendum time. Finger replied our best hope rests with who represents us – District 1 and At-large. There are some in Matthews, Mint Hill and Pineville who would support it too. CMS is concerned with flight to private and parochial schools. You could be talking about a Charlotte School System and County School System, said Jeter.

## **Other Business**

**A – School Signs and Other Traffic Safety Measures – McCourt 1<sup>st</sup>, Finger 2<sup>nd</sup>, passed 5-0 to support installation of these in front of schools in town.**

**B – Approve Minutes – McCourt 1<sup>st</sup>, Gillmore 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

### **Closing Comments**

**Jeter said one of the great things about this committee is that we disagree, it's a greater service to the community.**

Finger asked if we should get any feedback on schools from the Transportation Committee. Jeter told her the timing was not right yet.

The group discussed moving the meeting to an early evening, Jeter said he'd contact the group about an alternate date/time.

McCourt motioned to Adjourn, Gillmore seconded.

Meeting Adjourned.