

NESHAMINY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

PUBLIC BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
NESHAMINY BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS  
(WORK SESSION)  
September 13, 2005

The Neshaminy Board of School Directors met in public session on September 13, 2005, in the Board Room of the Maple Point Middle School. The following persons were in attendance:

**BOARD MEMBERS:**

Mr. Richard M. Eccles, President  
Dr. William H. Spitz, Vice-President  
Mrs. Sue C. Barrett  
Mrs. June R. Bostwick  
Mr. Jason Bowman  
Ms. Carol A. Drioli  
Mrs. Susan Cummings  
Mrs. Kimberly A. Jowett  
Mr. Ritchie Webb

**ADMINISTRATORS:**

Mr. P. Howard Wilson  
Dr. Louis T. Muenker  
Dr. Sandra Costanzo  
Mr. Joseph V. Paradise  
Mrs. Jacqueline Rattigan  
Mr. Bruce M. Wyatt

**SECRETARY:**

Mrs. Anita E. Walls

**SOLICITOR:**

Thomas J. Profy, III, Esquire

**OTHERS:** Approximately 25 persons from the public, staff and press

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**1. Call to Order**

Mr. Eccles called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

Mr. Eccles requested those in attendance join in the salute to the flag.

**3. Announcements**

Mr. Eccles read the following statement:

“Planning documents prepared by the architect of Neshaminy District for Neshaminy High School Additions and Alteration Project were released to one or more members of the public prior to completion of the review of planning documents by members of the school board and district administration. This release of the planning documents was not authorized by the school board or the superintendent and was contrary to the policy of the school district which is to make information available to all members of the public at the same time. I, as board president want to apologize to the public for this premature and selected release of information, and to inform the public that I, as board president, the board members and the administration will exercise our best efforts at all times to see that the future plans and information pertaining to the high school project are released to all members of the public at the same time.”

**4. Public Comment**

Ray Cancila, Langhorne, PA stated that he is an 11<sup>th</sup> grade student at Neshaminy High School and he would like to inform the school board and the community about his feelings regarding the renovation plan. He was disappointed when the referendum to rebuild Neshaminy High School was rejected. In April, 2005 11,088 people voted against the project and 7,120 supported it. He is glad the school board is in favor of renovating Neshaminy High School because the existing building needs a lot of work. He watched two of the board meetings which Mr. Erickson, the President of ATS&R, delivered a power point presentation

about the renovation plan. Personally, he is in favor of the main street concept also known as Option A. Two story additions were shown in the presentation, and he believes that they are much better than the existing one story area. The additions will be able to hold more rooms and air circulation will be contained better. When Mr. Erickson spoke for the first time there was an area in question, the Performing Arts Center, which is also known as G-9. He is glad that it is no longer part of the design. G-9 does not have handicap accessibility and the area needs improvement. The lights make an annoying buzzing sound which is a disruption of the classes that take place in the area. He is glad the board decided to build a new Performing Arts Center, rather than try to improve the current insufficient one.

On Wednesday, September 7<sup>th</sup>, Ray heard a loud striking noise in one of the courtyards. He found out that the ground was being struck by a large cylindrical object, and there was surveying taking place. Even though he had to deal with the noise he is glad to know that Neshaminy is getting started with the renovation project. Even though he will not get to enjoy the renovated building as a student he is glad the school board has decided to renovate Neshaminy High School. He hoped to have his children attend the newly renovated building in the future. He can not wait to see the new building when complete. Thank you.

Mr. Solis Basen, Langhorne, PA, stated that his comments are in regard to the plans and renovations for the high school. Mr. Basen does not know whether the architect is trying to hide things or not, but the public was told that they could ask questions and write in questions regarding the new construction. Mr. Basen went on the computer recently and got the plans from February. At that time the project was a proposed \$62M. Mr. Basen called the administration and he was told that it would be on-line in a couple of days. The current plan shows \$75M. Nothing was heard from the board as to how they reached that figure or what happened. The administration and the architect have their own discussions. Mr. Basen has heard nothing about why the costs have jumped close to \$20M. The public is not being informed. Mr. Basen feels that the board is not being informed. Mr. Basen thinks it is rhetoric between the administration and the architect. Mr. Basen noted that the television presentation was not adequate. The slides were small and everything was far away. The public is in the dark. The public does not know what is going on. Mr. Basen feels that some of the board members do not know what is going on.

Mrs. Rita Geddes, Feasterville, PA, stated that her children attend Poquessing Middle School and Neshaminy High School. Mrs. Geddes wanted to discuss the proposed addition to Gym 3. As a physical therapist, sedentary life styles and obesity are the biggest health crisis facing the nation. The federal and state government can confirm that fact. The Neshaminy physical education department has recognized that as a leader in the country for developing a program geared toward life long fitness, in other words, physical education is not something that you go to for one or two periods a week, it is something designed to get the students to enjoy fitness activities and things that will keep you in good cardiac condition throughout the student's entire life. The rock wall received much discussion. As much of the other physical education equipment in Neshaminy, the rock wall was purchased through grants, not by local taxpayer's dollars. The Neshaminy physical education department has received numerous items by grants and they are a leader in the area school districts for receiving grants. Mrs. Geddes noted that there are currently 2,400 students that take gym in three gyms. Mrs. Geddes had difficulty finding one open period a week for a gym class. Mrs. Geddes stated that the district is proposing 400 more students will be attending the high school. Mrs. Geddes is concerned how the district will house these students in two gyms. The proposed space originally called for a full gym, however, the physical education department looked at it, and said that they could go with smaller stations so that the square footage could be reduced in order to save money and not spend more money.

Mrs. Geddes stated that another issue was classroom space and how the numbers of classrooms were arrived at for any given subject. Every student must take social studies, for example, or English. If there are 2,800 students, it will be used 90% of the time, that is 7.2 periods per day, divided by an average of 26 students per class, and you need 15 classrooms. The numbers can be fudged slightly, but it still comes out to 14 or 15 classrooms per subject. All of these issues were looked at starting in year 2000

with the Facilities Enrollment Committee which Mrs. Geddes personally volunteered many hours to examine the figures. In 2002 the Steering Committee was formed and options were continued to be examined. Can we afford to slow down any more? In 2002 a new school would have cost less than what it is costing the district for this plan. Three years have cost the taxpayers millions of dollars and has cost each household millage. The project has already been five years. How much slower can we go? How much longer can we keep throwing good money at the existing school just to keep it functioning from day to day? The cost of the construction is increasing more than the inflation rate. The cost of bonds is speculated to rise within the next few years. Ten million dollars has already been wasted. We cannot afford to wait any longer. The public elected board members to lead; please lead us. Mrs. Geddes trusts that the board is looking at all the issues and investigative work. Mrs. Geddes would like the board to come to a decision. The students of Neshaminy School District are worth it, the community is worth it.

Mr. Joe Blasch, Feasterville, PA, prefaced his statement by saying that he is favor of the renovations of the building, however, he is disturbed that the cost of the current project has gone from an estimated \$66M to \$75M in only a few short months. Mr. Blasch believes that the board should be asking what specifically has made the cost go up to \$75M. The board should be asking why were the additions proposed at the last meeting included initially. Mr. Blasch is not suggesting that the district does not need what is proposed, but why was it not proposed originally. Finally, what will prevent the cost from going from \$75M to \$85M? Up to \$85M borrowing was approved last August and it seems like the district is headed in that direction.

Mr. Kevin Yeingst, Feasterville, PA, questioned the board regarding busing to Catholic schools. In the A.M. the student is dropped off at Poquessing and then picked up and transferred to the Catholic school. In the P.M. they are dropped off at Calvary Chapel, which is next to a bar, and then picked up to go home. They are left unattended without supervision. Mr. Yeingst feels that this could be a dangerous situation. Mr. Yeingst asked the board to look into the situation.

Mr. Charles Lauble, Langhorne, PA, stated the when he lived in the district there were 36 graduates in the graduating class. Mr. Lauble visited the schools and looked at the renovation plans and Mr. Lauble would like to add some comments. Mr. Lauble has been doing research at the Grundy Library looking at the Courier Times and Delaware Valley Advance articles. Mr. Lauble is speaking about the 50's and 60's when the population and the school children in this district were growing exponentially. Mr. Lauble has looked at the tax rates back then and some of the articles with Dr. Oliver Heckman. At that time the school tax was not a burden on the taxpayers. That is when this district was growing. Mr. Lauble stated that something has happened over the course of time that the school taxes have become a burden on a big segment of the population in this school district. Mr. Lauble would hope that the board would come up with a plan, whether it is renovation or how you're handling the costs of the district, to put the school taxes back where they would not be a burden to the taxpayer. Some people are lucky and they can afford the taxes, some people are not that lucky. Some of the young people cannot afford the taxes. The board should come up with the most cost effective plan for the renovations. Mr. Lauble's son is in eleventh grade and if he needs to go through a little inconvenience in order to save some money, put my son through that inconvenience. Teach him a lesson. Make the most cost effective decisions as possible. Put the school taxes back in line.

Mr. Howard Lindner, Langhorne, PA, agrees that all school projects should be open to anyone in the public to go and examine at any time since it is the public's tax dollars. Many people in the public would like to study same and look it through. Mr. Lindner gets calls from people and one older gentleman stated that it is a scam. If the project was supposed to be \$66M why would they approve an \$80M-\$85M bond? Unless they knew what was to come. Mr. Lindner received another call regarding the projected costs and the fact that the professionals could figure out the problems and put it into the costs. The caller stated that if there is liability insurance there should be a suit, because it was in the paper and on T.V. \$66M. Mr. Lindner questioned how many teachers and administrators live within our school district. Years ago teachers needed to live within the district that they taught in. Mr. Lindner was always against something

like that. People who don't live in the district can't feel the district. They can't feel the tax increase. They don't go to football games, etc. There are no true feelings toward the community or their projects. Democracy is all different opinions. Renovations, new construction, etc., but the final point is the vote, what takes places in the polling place. Mr. Lindner feels that if the architect went to the teachers they would want the world. One caller suggested why not a citizens input group, business people, builders, ex-administrators, ex-teachers., etc. Why not a group and looking over the project.

Mr. Lindner addressed Dr. Spitz regarding a newspaper article. Mr. Eccles asked Mr. Lindner to keep his comments related to the school and issues regarding the construction and not political issues.

## 5. Items for Discussion

### a) **High School Project Questions**

Dr. Muenker provided a brief answer to the questions submitted by the public:

1. When will this project get started and when will it be finished?  
Bids will go out in March, April 2006 followed by the breaking of ground in the summer of 2006. Completion to be in the summer or fall, 2009.
2. Will this project take place in the summer months or during the school year?  
The work cannot just take place during the summer months.
3. Will there be background checks done on any person working on this project?  
School Code is in place for this concern and Dr. Muenker will work together with Mr. Profy regarding this issue.
4. Are you going to have air conditioning in the high school (teaching rooms and special ed. rooms)?  
Yes.
5. The school board has approved \$66M for the refurbishing of the high school, why not complete the need list with this amount and then prioritize the want and wish list, then spend to the \$66M cap and cease the project?  
\$66M did not take into account the fees for the architect and construction manager firm which added an additional \$5M. The current plan is at \$75M, but again, this is a figure that is projected and will not be aligned until all the bids are in based on the construction costs.
6. Why are soft costs 20% of the project?  
Soft costs are professional fees, permits, licenses, furniture relocation, movable fixtures, asbestos abatement, zoning fees, insurance costs, modulars, etc. Those in total will equal the 20% figure. (Example: \$3.3M - architect, \$1.7M - construction management fee, \$2.0M - asbestos abatement, \$700,000 - modulars, etc.)
7. Please explain the following terms and their need for inclusion in the school reconstruction.
  - a) Food Labs
  - b) Foods Design Lab
  - c) Manufacturing Production Lab

Term Food Labs and Foods Design Lab are family living, cooking, sewing, home economics. Manufacturing Production Lab is shop class.
8. Why are the Arts Crafts (Photo Electric Arts; Graphic Arts) spaces as large as 4 Biology labs?

- The learning areas include both stationary and portable equipment and tools and combine traditional classroom teaching space along with work lab areas which require more square feet than your traditional science labs.
9. Would some of these Arts departments be better served in the Tech School?  
Different needs and the tech school are designed for students who concentrate on a very specific career. The courses are necessary at the high school in order to satisfy elective requirements that are required by the state. 21 credits are required for diploma. 4.8 credits need to be electives.
  10. How much are we saving by renovating rather than rebuilding new?
  11. What does the savings amount to for taxes per year? Is it significant?  
  
Comparison needs to take place. It does not make sense to revisit the concept of building a new facility. This community voted for a plan other than new. The plan now calls for 60% new construction and 40% renovation construction.  
The cost will be approximately \$75M. That is a savings from the original figures for new construction.
  12. Is money being set aside for the possibility that costs will increase when parts of the school are torn apart and other unforeseen problems occur?  
Yes. Cost estimates are taken into account. Contingency fees are set aside.
  13. How will you protect the children from health problems that may occur during renovation (dust, asbestos, etc.)?  
Every attempt will be made to be proactive to minimize the health risks. This will require constant communication between the construction manager and the school officials.
  14. How will you do this renovation without disrupting the students' learning during the school year?  
Communication must be ongoing and when necessary adjustments and/or accommodations may need to occur.
  15. Will the 9<sup>th</sup> graders be able to attend the new school?  
Yes.
  16. Please give more details (plan, timeframe) for asbestos removal.
  17. Since NHS is being rebuilt to current enrollment projections, where is building expansion most likely to occur if enrollment increases in the future?  
Plan is designed for 2,800 students – grades 9-12. 2009 – the district will be well within the 2800 student enrollment.  
The District should be in fine shape up until 2014. Thereafter, it is difficult to project enrollment.
  18. The BASCO 2002 report said work was needed on the bleachers in the stadium (due to water damage). Do the current reconstruction plans address those needs?  
Currently there are no provisions to address this question; however, repairs have been made to the bleachers to extend the life of the bleachers. The funds were taken from the current operating budget.
  19. How many mods will be used during the construction? Will special Science mods be used for science classes (if applicable)?  
There will be 16 modulars on site to allow for students to continue their education.
  20. What is the utilization capacity of the current NHS plan?

In speaking with the architect it will be 92%-93% utilization.

21. Reference has been made to “deferred maintenance” items not included in the \$75 million plan; please list the deferred maintenance items and associated add-on cost.  
The term presently in use is “add alternates” which represents those items which the District would like to see completed within this project. Gym 3 is a perfect example, since the floor and bleachers at some time will need to be replaced. The board will need to decide when that will occur.
22. What steps will be taken to insure that noise levels and air quality are within acceptable tolerances during class time?
23. For students with ailments (asthma, etc.) who are unable to cope with reduced air quality, what accommodations will be made for them?  
Questions 22 and 23 are similar and the questions are critical and will need to be revisited as the project starts and is in progress. The primary focus will be the health, safety and well being of our students, staff and other workers in the facility.
24. Do you realize that our reputation has been damaged by the fact that we look like we don't care about educating our children?
25. Do you realize that if I had known three years ago that this school district had cared so little about educating my child and cared more about taxes that I would not have moved to this school district?

Dr. Muenker submitted to the board and public these responses and hope that they are helpful in trying to address some of the questions and concerns.

Mr. Eccles suggested that this type of question and answer session take place at the upcoming meetings. This will be a good way for the public to remain informed.

Mrs. Barrett questioned the large group instruction area. Dr. Muenker noted that this area is replacing the demolished G-9A area. It will be utilized for drama classes, speech classes and will accommodate three study halls per period. This area will be utilized every single period of the day.

Ms. Drioli just wanted to clarify that the board approved the ability to obtain a \$70M loan. The Board could have gone up to \$85M. The board did not approve the ability to obtain an \$85M loan.

## **6. Items for Approval**

### **a) Overnight Trips**

- I. Neshaminy High School Student/Advisor attendance at PSBA Convention, Hershey, PA - October 26-28, 2005
- II. Neshaminy High School Girls Basketball Team to the Wildwood Tournament, Wildwood, New Jersey - December 27-29, 2005
- III. Neshaminy High School Varsity Wrestlers Tournament, Manheim, PA - December 28-30, 2005
- IV. Neshaminy High School Wrestlers to King of the Mountain Tournament, Mill Hall, PA - January 16 -17, 2006
- V. Neshaminy High School Debate Team to State Debate Tournament, Selinsgrove, PA - March 23-25, 2006
- VI. Neshaminy High School French Class Trip to Quebec - March 29- April 2, 2006
- VII. Neshaminy High School History Club to Historic Sites, Charleston, SC April 7 - 11, 2006

There was board consensus for the seven trips.

**b) Approval of Tax Assessment Appeals**

Mr. Paradise informed the board regarding two commercial properties which the district is challenging the assessment.

Mr. Profy advised that the memorandum speaks for itself and Mr. Sengpiel, the appraiser for the school district, identified these two properties as having a substantial deviation between his estimate of the fair market value and the fair market value of the assessment.

A motion will be made at the upcoming public meeting.

**c) Approval of Bank Account**

Mr. Paradise advised that it is necessary for the board to approve the opening of an account. A board motion will be made at the end of the month.

**d) Easement for Ferderbar Outdoor Pool**

Mr. Profy advised that the leased premises can be expanded to include the area required for the handicapped accessible ramp.

Ms. Drioli advised that Lower Southampton Township runs a summer program at Ferderbar Elementary and uses the outdoor pool which is owned by the school district. The Township has a thirty year lease with the school district to lease the pool from the school district. The Township received a grant to refurbish the pool and the work has been done. The work, however, is not complete until a handicap ramp is installed. If the ramp is not installed the Township will lose the grant money provided.

Mr. Profy suggested that a copy of the plans should be provided to the Facilities Department of the school district.

Board consensus was reached and it will be approved at the public meeting on September 27, 2005.

**e) Bids/Budget Transfers**

Information distributed prior the meeting. Mr. Paradise reviewed the following bids:

Bid No. 06-15 Reconditioning Football Equipment

Bid Amount: \$35,100.00

The bid is for reconditioning of football equipment for all four middle schools and Neshaminy High School for school year 2005-2006.

Bid No. 06-19 Above/Inground Fuel Management System (Re-bid)

Bid Amount: \$15,027.16

The bid is for purchase and installation of fuel management system at the Transportation Department.

Mr. Paradise advised that he was not happy with the original price of the bid and opted to have it done differently. It was rebid with the option to utilize the existing pump.

Bid No. 06-20 Musical Instruments

Bid Amount: \$17,744.35

The bid is for musical instruments and accessories for K-12 instruction throughout the district.

The three bids will be presented for approval at the September 27<sup>th</sup> public meeting.

**7. Items for Information**

**a) Summer School 2005**

Dr. Muenker advised that a summer school summary has been provided to the board members. There was a small margin of profit with the summer school program. The program next year will be held at Maple Point due to the construction at the High School facility.

Mrs. Cummings questioned where the profits will be used. Mr. Paradise advised that the profits will remain in the general fund.

**8. Superintendent's Report**

Mr. Wilson advised that the beginning of school was great. Transportation problems were minimal. The school buildings looked great. Mr. Wilson commended Ms. Rattigan, Mr. Wyatt and Dr. Muenker for a great job on staffing.

Mr. Wilson informed the board that the Suicide Prevention Task Force is moving along. They are currently working on policies, procedures and interviewing people. A meeting is scheduled for tomorrow evening.

The Co-curricular programs have gotten off to a great start. The band is wearing their new uniforms.

Mr. Wilson apologized for not playing the National Anthem at the last football game.

Mrs. Barrett questioned where the summer work projects took place. Mr. Paradise advised that major work took place at Hoover, boiler and roof work at Poquessing, roof work at Maple Point, security systems, asbestos removal, etc.

**9. Committee Reports**

**a) Board Policies**

Mr. Bowman advised that a meeting is scheduled for October 18<sup>th</sup>. Policies to be reviewed are bid procedures, weapons, drug free work place and No Child Left Behind.

**b) Educational Development**

Dr. Spitz advised that a meeting is scheduled for September 21<sup>st</sup> and PSSA scores will be discussed.

**c) Finance/Facilities**

Mr. Webb advised that a meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 15<sup>th</sup>.

**d) IU Board**

Mr. Drioli advised that a meeting is scheduled for next week.

**e) Educational Foundation**

Mrs. Cummings advised that the Fall Fundraiser will take place on October 21<sup>st</sup> at Kings Caterers. The theme for the evening will be "A Murder Mystery." Tickets are \$40.00 per person. Open to the public.

**f) Technical School**

Dr. Spitz provided a handout regarding the Articles of Agreement. Dr. Spitz advised that an idea has surfaced to eliminate the conventions held in December and May. Each district will still need to approve the annual budget under the same rules. Rather than do this at the convention in May, each district could have a roll call vote during a regular board meeting. The results would then be forwarded to the Tech School.



Dr. Spitz advised that the election of officers usually takes place at the December convention. The proposal is to have the election of officers be the responsibility of the Joint Board Committee which meets once a month.

Dr. Spitz advised that Bensalem School District will take the lead in changing the Articles of Agreement.

There is a proposal to having a January dinner which is during School Board Recognition Month.

Dr. Spitz advised that the Articles of Agreement need to be changed in order to allow for the establishment of a Capital Reserve Fund.

Mr. Wilson asked if any Board members would be available to attend the Tech School Meetings. The meetings are usually less than one-half hour.

**g) Technology**

Mrs. Jowett advised that there was no report.

**10. Future Topics**

Mrs. Barrett inquired whether the architect and the construction manager would be back to answer questions regarding the project. Mr. Eccles suggested that any questions should be funneled through the Finance Committee.

**11. Agenda Development for the September 27, 2005 Public Meeting**

**12. Other Board Business**

Ms. Drioli just wanted to reiterate that the high school project was started with citizen input. A citizen group was formed with seniors, teachers, citizens, business people, etc. Their recommendation was to build new. However, at this point in time we are renovating. Ms. Drioli commented on Mr. Lindner's remarks about waste and Mr. Eccles urged the Board not to make any reference to political affiliations or make personal attacks. Mr. Eccles took an attack last week and he would urge it to discontinue.

Ms. Drioli would appreciate it if the public would also adhere to proper conduct.

Mrs. Bostwick would just like to again reiterate that the state continues to reduce its contribution to the school district very significantly, and that has meant that taxes have needed to rise. Also, the district now has a tremendous amount of unfunded mandates.

**13. Adjournment of Meeting**

Mr. Webb moved the meeting be adjourned and Mrs. Cummings seconded the motion. The Board approved the motion with nine ayes. Mr. Eccles adjourned the meeting at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anita E. Walls  
Secretary