

SMITHTON COMMUNITY CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT #130

Smithton, Illinois 62285

Strategic Planning Committee Meeting, January 12, 2016

MINUTES

The Strategic Planning Committee meeting of the Board of Education of Smithton Community Consolidated School District #130 was held on January 12, 2016, in the Smithton School Art Room, 316 South Hickory, Smithton, Illinois 62285.

Sara Sutherland, Board Member, Superintendent, recorded minutes of the Strategic Planning Committee meeting held on January 12, 2016 beginning at 7:00 p.m.

Present:

Administrators: Superintendent Dr. Susan Homes and Principal Vicki Norton
Board of Education Members: Dale Barschak, Sara Sutherland, Ed Farley, and Jason Chandler.

Unicom-ARC Representatives: Rod Wright and Dan Burns.

FGM: Art Hayhurst and Andy Stehl

Facilitating Team Co-Chairs: Bob Mueller and Jason Becherer

Team Members: Eric Benedick, Jennifer Davis, Linda Elbe, Heidi Etling, Courtney Hammel, Shelley LePere, Eric Muckensturm, Michelle Smith, Tom Springborn, Neal Trentman, and Curt Whitworth.

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Susan Homes at 7:00 p.m.

Strategic Planning

Dr. Homes thanked the committee for attending the meeting. She introduced team co-chairs Bob Mueller and Jason Becherer as well as FGM architects Art Hayhurst and Andy Stehl. She also introduced Unicom-ARC strategic planning specialists Rod Wright and Dan Burns. Following those introductions, each participant introduced themselves to the group.

Dr. Homes reiterated the purpose of the meeting was to facilitate a community engagement process over the next six months to gain valuable insight from community members regarding the status of the school district. Dan Burns encouraged the group to consider changing its name from a strategic planning committee to a facilitating team to emphasize the fact that the group is designed to foster communication to and from the community. He also talked about the connotation of the term "team" versus committee.

Dr. Homes provided the team with an understanding of the connection between Unicom-ARC and the work of the team. Dr. Homes shared that she had worked with Unicom in her former district and that Unicom had been the strategic planning partner with Freeburg High School during its successful referendum project. The company has done extensive work with school district strategic planning throughout Illinois and Missouri as well as other states across the country, including a current project in New York. Rod Wright let the team know that their services were being provided free of charge to Smithton by Stifel Financial Corporation as they are providing the support to St. Clair County school

districts to engage communities related to the possibility of a county-wide one cent school facility sales tax. Rod explained that Stifel was willing to allow us to engage with Unicom for our specific purposes since it dovetailed into the discussion about the potential facility sales tax.

Dr. Homes reiterated the purpose of the meeting was to understand the community engagement process and that Dr. Wright and Mr. Burns would lead the team through that process during the evening sessions. Mr. Burns let the team know that he intended to honor the time limit of the meeting and would have the participants out of the meeting by 9 p.m. He encouraged the team to make that a norm for future meetings.

Dr. Homes turned the meeting over to Dan and Rod. Dan thanked the team for attending the night's session and complimented them on their commitment. He indicated the size of the group was larger than he would have expected for a district our size and that it was a good sign of the importance the school plays in the community.

Mr. Burns started off with a discussion about why community engagement is important. He shared that community engagement:

- Creates sense of community and strengthens trust
- Gives public "voice" to community
- Broad participation provides for diversity of opinion
- Helps keep community and district "on the same page"
- Community is increasingly resistant to "top-down" planning
- Grassroots approach enhances understanding, involvement, buy-in
- *Discovery* is more powerful than *persuasion*
- Puts more people in the "decision-making circle"
- Public permission is needed for meaningful change
- Public won't support what it does not understand
- It is a powerful communications tool

He then focused his attention on the "how" of community engagement, focusing on the following critical elements:

- Involves a large number of people
- True dialogue resulting in collective agreement
- Grassroots community participation
- More than the "usual suspects"
- Citizen leadership
- True, two-way communication
- Data / information driven
- Internal support and acceptance
- Clear charge
- Comprehensive timeline / syllabus
- Work sessions with a specific agenda

- Work sessions with small group activities
- Key information learned / collective agreement
- Open, transparent, well documented
- Meetings start and end on time

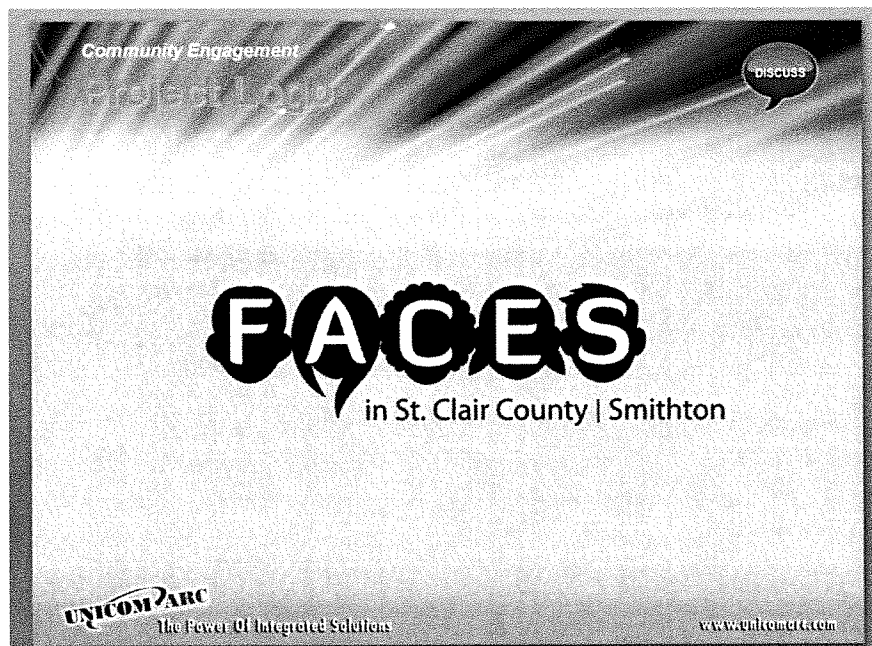
Mr. Burns spent time talking about the community engagement “process” steps. He led off with the importance of a Board of Education “charge” that is adopted to put the process in motion. Dr. Homes drew the team’s attention to the draft charge statement contained in their packets. She reported that the charge was a collection of the goals identified through the previous strategic planning meetings. She asked for input regarding the charge to ensure the team had consensus with the draft document. The draft charge is listed below:

- Engage community members in discussions about the following:
 - State of the School District – Facilities, Finances, Teaching & Learning
 - Characteristics of Facility Environments for 21st Century Teaching & Learning
 - Status of Current Facilities
 - Physical Conditions
 - Adequacy/Alignment for Optimum Instruction/Learning
 - Potential Facility Improvements for the Future
 - Options for Funding Facility Improvements —
 - School Facility Sales Tax
 - Reserves
 - Bonds
 - Alternate revenue sources
- Report Findings to St. Clair County Task Force – School Facility Sales Tax
- Report Findings and Recommendations to Smithton Board of Education

Mr. Burns then moved on to a depiction of the *Draft Process Steps* that are underway in St. Clair County to engage stakeholders in a discussion about the county-wide school facility sales tax issue. He emphasized that the community engagement program did not have a predetermined outcome—that it was simply designed to allow community members throughout the area to hear about what the sales tax is and to help decide whether or not it is a topic that should be placed on the ballot for voters to consider. As Smithton is a district contained in St. Clair County, it would be essential for Smithton

residents to understand the initiative and provide input into the process as well. Dr. Wright shared with the group that with the necessary amount of support, it would be possible for the issue to appear on the November 2016 ballot but that was not certain and would definitely depend on community input. The slide showing the *Draft Process Steps* was difficult to read so Dr. Homes offered to send a full-size version of the slide to team members following the meeting.

Dr. Wright and Mr. Burns then led a discussion about branding our community engagement initiative. A logo had been developed for the St. Clair County work and they suggested that Smithton adopt the same logo – simply added Smithton to the end to emphasize county-wide commitment and familiarity. Several team members expressed initial concern about the name as it was the name of a drinking establishment in the East St. Louis area but that establishing had closed nearly ten years before. The feeling of the group, in general, was that the logo would work for our process. The logo is shown below:



Mr. Burns then moved on to a discussion of the steps for developing a long-range plan. He talked about the Facilitating Team Process—coordinates and facilitates the process to ensure it is open and fair; and operates effectively and efficiently. He also mentioned that the community engagement sessions would determine “what” will be in the Plan.

He reviewed the typical type of people that should serve on the facilitating team – the “Who.” This listed included:

- Community chairs/citizens
- Internal coordinator
- Organization executives
- Board liaisons

- Association / union leadership
- Special Advisors
- Finance
- Architect / construction professionals
- UNICOM•ARC
- Other appropriate members

He shared the responsibilities/roles of the facilitating team which included:

- Attend Facilitating Team Meetings (FTMs) and Community Engagement Sessions (CESs)
- Serve as a resource as needed (CESs)
- Monitor and observe (CESs)
- Assist in identifying topics for CES
- Assist with material distribution/collection (CESs)
- Ensure meetings run smoothly and efficiently (CESs)
- Strategize presentations for CES
- Review content of presentations prior to CES
- Recruit participants and promote CES:
 - Phone calls
 - Social Media Sharing
 - Postcards
 - Emails
 - Face-to-face invitations
- Promote CES to clubs, organizations or groups to which you belong
- Participate in debriefing following CES and assist in planning next meeting
- Develop/present summary report

Mr. Burns then went on to describe the role of the community chairs (Bob Mueller and Jason Becherer):

- Allow use of name in printed materials and promotions
- Participate in media interviews
- Introduce speakers and topics at CES
- Serve as hosts at CES
 - Greeting participants
 - Thanking participants
- Circulate through the room during small-group work session at CES
- Assist in reporting out at CES
- Help coordinate summary report to Board
- Recruit people from your circles of influence to participate in Community Engagement

The next topic of discussion involved understanding who the session participants (community members) should be:

- Anyone Who Wants to Participate
 - Parents
 - Residents
 - Staff
 - Students
 - All Stakeholders

Session participants at the community meetings:

- Receive & review key information according to timeline and syllabus
- Process information in small group work sessions to reinforce learning
- Reach consensus/general agreement on key issues
- Develop summary information based on collective agreement

To garner participation at the community sessions, Mr. Burns recommends that a strong communication plan be put in place, including recruitment, building-level engagement teams, and automated phone calling. This process should begin at least one month prior to the first community engagement session. In addition, these additional communication vehicles were suggested:

- Letter of Invitation
- Brochure/Flyers
- Community Outreach – Listeners Bureau/Briefings
- Mailings
- Media (Print/Electronic)
- Video
- Internet / E-Mail /Pod casts
- Social Media

Mr. Burns shared that Dr. Homes had sent him draft copy for a mailer that would be sent out to all postal patrons in the Smithton district to announce the process and the community engagement meetings. Dr. Homes offered to get pictures of Mr. Becherer and Mr. Mueller to Mr. Burns on Wednesday to help get the draft in a proof-ready format by the end of the week.

Mr. Burns reported that the Smithton community engagement sessions were scheduled to be held in the Smithton cafeteria. Dr. Homes reported that the district owned 24 rectangular tables and planned to set up small group work settings using those tables during the CES sessions.

Mr. Burns presented a typical session agenda:

- Welcome & opening remarks
- Data / informational presentation

- Description of work activity and instructions
- Small group work
- Small groups present work results to all participants
- Closing / preview of next session

Mr. Burns reported that verbatim responses would be collected from the group work during the CES sessions and would be prepared in an executive summary for the district. Ultimately it is the goal of the process to result in a summary report of key information learned, collective agreement topics, development of a document that reviews, refines, and finalizes recommendations and presents the report to the Board of Education.

Next, the team reviewed the draft schedule that had been pre-prepared by Dr. Homes. Suggestions were made to make some date changes. Dr. Homes indicated she would be in contact with Bob Mueller and Jason Becherer to reach a new tentative schedule.

Following the formal presentation, Mr. Burns asked the team for suggestions for the content of the first community engagement meeting. During brainstorming, the team suggested:

- Finances (“bucket” presentation)
- State funding
- Test results
- Teacher qualifications and education
- Curriculum
- Pros and cons of district
- Positive things happening in the district
- Diagram of school construction additions with notes about why each construction addition/rehab was necessary.

Several members of the team expressed concern that the *Draft Charge* statement that had been presented earlier in the meeting may give some community members the impression that the process would lead to a building referendum. Dr. Homes emphasized that there was no plan for the process to lead to a building referendum and that no such design work was planned or would be included in the spring meetings. She noted that should the community desire to consider a construction project, plans could be considered for meetings around that topic after the conclusion of the upcoming engagement period. Several members reiterated their concern that the community had lost trust in the school after the last referendum in 2013. Dr. Homes noted that it was not her intention or the intention of the board to “railroad” anything through the community and that the engagement process would hopefully restore some trust in the community regarding the district’s intentions. Dr. Homes indicated she would be writing an article describing the objectives of the engagement process and to encourage community members to attend meetings simply to educate themselves about the current state of the school district as well as to share their thoughts/goals/aspirations for the school. Dr. Homes agreed that

removing the word “facilities” from the potential meeting subjects and from the draft charge, to the degree possible, may help minimize the perception that the district had already predetermined what it wished the community to decide.

Co-chairs Bob Mueller and Jason Becherer suggested that the team add another member—a senior citizen from the community that could provide another layer of representation to the process. They indicated they had an idea of a person to invite and would reach out to that person with an invitation.


Mr. Burns suggested that the district make contact with the social media specialist they have on staff to assist with the development of an online presence to keep the community up-to-date on the work of the team as well as to provide transparency regarding meetings and minutes.

The team agreed to set the next facilitating team meeting for Monday, January 25 from 7 – 9 p.m. in the Art Room.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:03 p.m.



President



Secretary