

OFFICIAL MINUTES FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING OF THE
ARKANSAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF
ARKANSAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

The Board of Trustees for the Arkansas School for the Deaf and the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired met for their monthly meeting on July 19, 2016.

Present: Mary Weeks, Chairperson; Dr. Doug Watson, Vice Chairperson; Faith McLaughlin, Secretary; Susan Pack, Board Member; Jeanne Tribett, ASBVI Parent Representative; Harry Pompeo, ASD Parent Representative; James Caton, ASBVI Superintendent; Dr. Janet Dickinson, ASD Superintendent; Stephanie Ott and Beth Smith, Interpreters; Members of the Deaf Community; Members of the Blind Community; Hillcrest Residents

Call to Order

Ms. Weeks called the meeting to order at 3:55 pm. The next meeting was scheduled for August 16, 2016 at the Arkansas School for the Deaf.

16-J-009 Motion to Approve Joint Minutes

Ms. Weeks asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the June meeting. Ms. McLaughlin made a motion to approve the June minutes and Ms. Pack seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion Items

ASD Parent Rep – Harry Pompeo

Mr. Pompeo said he was waiting on Ernie to bring report. He said he could start with principal's report. He said Summer Camp was very successful. He said they were working on the ASD handbook. He said there was painting and replacing the floors in progress. He said registration day was August 14th and the first day of school will be the 15th. He said the teachers would return on August 8th. He said he now had the athletic director's report. He said the Nutt Athletic Complex basketball floor court needed a scrubbing as it was very dry. He said it has been shined and looks amazing. He said it had been painted. He said they had new blue picnic tables that would be put out by football field. He said all sport schedules were ready and on the website.

ASB Parent Rep – Jeannie Tribbett

Ms. Tribett said she had nothing to report since it was summer.

Ms. Weeks said the board had just received the updated bike trail maps today. She said some of the members had been looking at what would be involved in putting the trail together. She said she would like for the superintendents to voice their opinion on the bike trail. Dr. Dickinson said regarding the bike trail in her personal opinion she thought there were two men that have come to give them information that they need. She said they realize it is for a good cause. She said in her opinion the bike trail becomes public property. She said in the end they would lose land and seems like nothing but when you drive by it is that much more space that we lose. She said it was a big deal to the school and community. She said she thought it would be hard to consider it if there was not something given back to benefit the schools. She said she was not sure their community would support it but she would like to see what could be offered back as a benefit to the schools. She said the things that had been discussed were 1) the overpass – it does not appear that the deaf community uses it and it has become an eye sore. She said it either needs to be improved or removed. 2) She said she knew there had been concern about if someone needed to cross the street and having a light for them. She said there should be signage that clarifies there are deaf and blind children in the area. 3) She said there are people who walk on to the campus frequently that do not belong on the campus. She said they stopped two this morning that were just walking around on their campus so she feels like for the deaf side they would benefit from the fence so the fence needs to be continued. She said there were things they could benefit from with this project so she is looking for more discussion.

Mr. Caton said from his perspective it is looking at it from the standpoint of something changing that has been in place for a long time. He said ASB has always had this big expansive front lawn that he and other people find very attractive. He said when you think about making a change to that it is disruptive and a level of invasive even if there may be certain benefits to it. He said he wasn't clear what the benefits to the school would be other than participating in a community project which is important for schools to be a part of their communities. He said overall he could not get settled on such a huge change for the front lawn. He said he was not sure that other people associated with the school would disagree with him on that. He said he was a biker himself and had a certain bias toward bike trails and understands the need for them although he is not totally convinced on the need for this one running through two schools. He said his main concern still remains with the crosswalk for the main entrance. He said it is a very high traffic area and doesn't think it has yet been really appreciated how much traffic comes through at all times of the day. He said it is a very difficult turn left into the area as well as turning left out of it. He said again the crosswalk was his main concern as well as not being clear on what is really going to happen to a number of the trees which he hates to think about losing any of them because they add to the openness and beauty of the front lawn.

Mr. Caton said also where the trail begins would come off the alley and curve through part of our lot on the corner space where the Alumni have the annual Christmas Tree sale and that is an important fundraiser for the Alumni Association and the school benefits from those funds. He said one possible benefit for the school is it would improve some of the drainage problems we have in that area. He said these were some of the things he had looked at and he thinks the biggest thing is trying to settle on is do we want that kind of change for everyone. He said he likes to think that the school is a landmark in the community and people drive by and see the expansive front lawn – how would adding a project like that would change it. He said it does open up the school a little more to the public. He said those were his thoughts on the project.

Ms. Pack said she appreciated all the work that has gone into this but it still baffles her about it cutting across the schools. She said her concern was safety. She said 20 and 30 years ago when she was principal and Superintendent she often heard complaints about trying to turn in with the traffic and now it is worse. She said there are as many as 10 busses that pull out of this campus every morning during busy traffic time and in the afternoon as well during the busy traffic time. She said she realizes that these are important in the city and important to make your city strong. She said she thinks it is the wrong place for it and it is the safety of the children. She said she knows there are places where there is more traffic but the people using those places are not deaf and not blind. She said that was a real concern to her.

Ms. McLaughlin said her main concern was also the traffic and making that turn off Markham and what is going to happen with the bikers – they cannot have the right of way when people are trying to make a left hand turn. She said that it would be an accident waiting to happen. She said as far as the bike path itself she had not been terribly opposed to it. She said she thought it would be good for the community as long as the trail isn't that invasive onto the property of either school. She said if it could stay parallel to the sidewalk it would be an extension for the walkers. She said she liked the idea of the bike trail but is also concerned about the safety issue. She said there should be a light, a warning and some kind of sign that says there are deaf and blind children here. She said as far as the Blind School side she does not like taking down trees either but of the trees that would come down one of them is rotten and the other two are pine trees. She said if she had an issue it would be with a signal coming into the school. She said she was not opposed to the bike trail if it could be done in a manner that would enhance the front of the building/looks of the school.

Ms. Tribett said a lot of our kids at the school would be visually able to ride bikes and asked if that was the majority of the kids at ASB. She said when she heard about the trail that was the angle she had been thinking about. She said her kids were too young but when they get into their high school years, she wondered if they and other children of the same visual abilities wouldn't benefit from having a place that they are familiar with.

Ms. Tribett said most of the kids have grown up on this campus starting at 3 years old and go through 18. She said they know this place like the back of their hand and wondered if it would not be a benefit to a lot of them. She said ever since she heard of the bike trail she has been thinking that as her kids grow up she would like to see them have access to something like that and even make it part of campus culture. She said right now there is no safe place to ride a bike. She said that is what her thoughts have been since she heard of the bike trail. Ms. Weeks said that is good coming from a parent standpoint because she had not thought about that. Mr. Caton said they do ride in the back. He said the school has several bikes for the kids. He said his concern with that might be a safety issue because you are bringing them that much closer to Markham. Ms. Tribett said as far as she was concerned that is part of the education system to move them outside of the safety of this campus into the world at large and bringing them that close teaching them right of way, etc. She said most schools teach Drivers Ed and that's not available here of course but maybe that could be something they could do. She said she thought it needed to be encouraged to have mobility that they can do on their own so they are not constantly reliant on someone else. She said her kids are 11 now and they already face that. She asked how do you teach them independence when they are constantly reliant on someone. She said that was just her opinion. Mr. Caton said it was very valid and appreciated because it is a delicate balance for the school. Ms. Tribett said as far as the alley goes as she understood it was a public street and people can do what they want on that road. She said as far as she has seen (and she said she drives here several times a day) has never seen ASB students that close to the road. She said she did not see how that would negatively affect the Blind School. She nothing short of a light is going to fix the traffic problem.

Dr. Watson said he had lived here and been an alumni of ASD for 64 years and in all this discussion he was still looking at how it is supposed to be all about the kids, where are our kids. He said this is about some community to have all of Arkansas bike wherever they want. He said this is the one state campus in Arkansas that is protected for deaf/blind and visually impaired and hearing impaired children. He said he has not heard one word about the children and how they are going to be biking around. He said this is a public effort to take over a trail when even where he lives in Chenal they ride with the traffic. He said what is the difference here and there - none. He asked how it was going to serve the kids to have all these people biking in their front yard. He said he could not relate to it. He said they could make trails where there was not a school. He said if it was going to be looked at he would want to do a count on how many people come and go every day from the campus from all the different entrances and how many other schools have bike trails in their front lawn. He said he lived 10 years in New York and shared the street with bikers. He said they need to show him benefits for the kids. He said there are other trails where you can teach a deaf or blind kid how to bike.

Mr. Pompeo said he has a deaf daughter and if someone sends my daughter and maybe a friend out without additional safety concerns, he is not crazy about that. He said to add safety devices he didn't know if he fully supports the bike path right now. He said he knew the LR Marathon uses the street every year and if you put in a bike path it will flood the area with people.

Ernie Northrup said it was a beautiful vision for him. He said right now the football field does not meet the qualifications and requirements for a track team. He said they need a place for shot put and some other things for their track but we don't have room for it. He said next to the football field might be doable if we expand would the bike path block that effort. He said he was tired of driving their kids to other schools and us not being able to access the things here. He said the kids need space to do whatever. He said the question is would putting in the bike trail inhibit ASD from expanding later.

Ms. Doan said she was the elementary principal and the athletic director at ASB and her background is orientation & mobility. She said she had been hit from behind by a bike once and grazed on the other side twice but when someone is coming at you and they have earphones in they are focused on what is immediately in front of them. She said ASB uses that area for track and field. She said if they encroach on our property she feels like the kids are going to be sitting ducks. She said if people are coming from both directions and a child has impaired vision and is counting on listening to the traffic on Markham as a sound source to keep them safe she thinks that is very dangerous for our kids.

Ray Bolen, elementary principal at ASD, said he would support whatever their opinion is. He said the idea of a bike trail from a deaf person's perspective he could see where other organizations would take advantage of that. He said he could see where the high school kids could use the bike trail. He said they could set up a cross country team. He said he sees the options that they would be open to. He said he was principal at the Indiana School for the Deaf. He said they had a trail on the campus and they worked it out with the community and they set up a deaf center so deaf people could make signage and art to post about deaf culture and awareness. He said they used it as a deaf awareness and history because many people passed the school and didn't know anything about the it. He said he sees the pros and cons to it. He said many people pass by and know the rich history that is here. He said he thought it could be used to increase awareness for the deaf culture and the blind culture. Ms. Weeks asked if there was a law against putting signs up like that. City representative said they had done it in other areas. Ms. Weeks said she thought he was talking about the school putting up the signs. City representative said they did not have an issue with it. He said downtown there were all kinds of informational signs. Mr. Bolen said it requires community involvement, donations and many other things.

Ms. Weeks said before she came to work here she didn't know anything about the blind and deaf schools. She said she thought anyone that came to school here was totally blind and she was an educated teacher/person. She said until she worked here and realized how the students could be integrated into society and working with other people. She said she didn't want the kids to be closed off and she wanted them to have experiences of the public. She said the public considers the blind and deaf as severely handicapped and unable to perform a regular job even though we put the students in job situations. She said she wants the mental idea changed about the deaf and blind. She said she wants people to know that these students can perform and are viable people. She said that is why she wants in some way to have the bike trail. She said the entrance way worries her and it worries her about here comes a bunch of bikers and a bus is trying to turn in – how do you stop the bikers so the bus does not have to sit out there. City representative said they would set it up where the people on the trail would have to yield or stop to vehicular traffic coming off Markham. Ms. Pack said now you are busy looking for oncoming cars and to have to look for cars and bikes concerns her. She said the ideal solution would be a traffic light with a left turn signal. City representative said you would still have to expand that intersection to put in a traffic signal so you are still talking about impacting the campus property. He said they understand the concerns you have. Ms. Pack asked if the city had looked at any other alternative other than this route. He said not with this type of facility no. Ms. Terry asked what times do they actually cycle. He said all times of the day. He said there is no particular rush hour like cars. Mr. Hill said there are a significant number that ride downtown. Ms. Terry said she already sees cyclists on Markham so is this just taking them off the street. City representative said it was not solely for bikers it would be for pedestrians also. He said the people you see riding on Markham are probably much more experienced and comfortable riding in traffic.

Dr. Watson said he would like to get back to the kids. He said they were talking about everything except the children and how they would benefit. He said he would like to move that they thank these people but decline in participating in this effort. Ms. Weeks said she was not ready to vote we should have a full board. Dr. Watson asked if there was a second and there was no second. He said he would never support it and didn't think the deaf community would either. Ms. Pack said she did not want to make a second because she wanted to wait till Everett was here. Mr. Hill said he would like to clarify one thing that he would not want what the Indiana School did for ASB. He said it is not a feasible way make people understand about blindness and their place in society. He said many dollars and time are spent exposing the children to the public and on information to send out and it is still a very tough fight in order to get the recognition and provide people with knowledge about blindness. He said there is no doubt in his mind about the people turning off Markham. He said they are looking at the traffic coming at them and not looking at the crosswalk and when they see an opening they gun it and go into the driveway. He said it will be a safety hazard in spite of the project being a good project.

Mr. Hill said there would have to be some restrictions on the bikers. The drivers are not courteous. He said if it is passed he would like to have some kind of signal or stop sign for the bikers to be aware of the high traffic area that come on the campus. He said it would be a benefit for the kids that are running for track because they run on the sidewalk now. He said the kids do not go down there by themselves. He said what he was saying was two things: 1) It is not going to solve the problem of getting the word out to people about blindness and what they can do; 2) It is going to be a real hazard. Ms. Pack said there were also three things that Janet had asked if they were going to check on and that is another reason she would like to wait for answers on that before a vote is taken. Dr. Watson said those three things have nothing to do with bike trails. He said they need to be done without a bike trail. He said their job was to find out how to get that done independent of the bike trail to protect our school/children. Ms. Weeks said she would like to wait until there is a full board. Dr. Watson said without a second to his motion they needed to go ahead with the regular schedule.

There being no further business of Joint nature, the agenda moved to the School for the Deaf.

Mary Weeks, Chair

Dr. Doug Watson, Vice –Chair (Secretary Absent)