

Board contemplates support for Ed. Foundation

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Foundation looking to go forward in grant application to Heginbotham Trust for local track project funds

Encouraged by the activation of a local education foundation, Holyoke School Board members recently contemplated their approach for showing support for the foundation's effort to pursue grant funds for a community track project on school grounds.

Board members concurred the foundation is a wonderful asset to the school district, and expressed wholehearted support for the foundation itself at the Nov. 17 Re-1J board meeting.

With the local Heginbotham Trust having received a recent donation from an estate, the Re-1J Foundation, Inc. is looking to apply for grant funds from the Trust for a track project on the current site of the school's football field and track.

Timing is the issue at hand, as the application to Heginbotham Trust must be submitted by the end of the year. The track would be used in partnership with the city and school at-large.

Board members were firm in noting they're certainly not ready to commit support to a track project which was a key discussion item two years ago. Much more information is needed before the board is ready for that.

In fact, Supt. Bret Miles pointed out the Re-1J board voted March 18, 2008 that the board itself would not revisit the track project for two years. That timeline ends in four months.

However, support for the foundation pursuing the funds and earmarking them for a track project is the current topic on the table.

After considerable discussion at last week's meeting, board president Dan Kafka said he will draft a letter to the foundation for the board's consideration at the Dec. 1 meeting.

Significant discussion was held last week in an effort to prepare the board to be ready to act on the issue next week. Additionally, the board is hoping to obtain input from the community before

Board contemplates support for Ed. Foundation

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

the Dec. 1 decision.

Foundation established in 1996

In an Re-1J Foundation, Inc. update, Supt. Miles noted the foundation was set up in 1996. Colver and Killin, LLC has done work behind the scenes in keeping the foundation alive in its nonprofit status, even though it has not been active in the past 13 years.

A Foundation board has now been reassembled, and is looking to move forward on some projects.

Miles noted it is a familiar role for foundations to go after grant moneys and then to bestow gifts to the taxing entity it stands behind. Even though the foundation is separate from the school district, it has the same interests and connections.

“We’re very fortunate to have this in place,” said Miles, referring to the Re-1J Foundation. He sees the potential for an incredibly strong long-term relationship between the foundation and the school district.

Support for Foundation not to be misconstrued as approval of track project

Too many financial unknowns were cited by individual school board members, when expressing reluctance to commit to going forward with a track project.

Board contemplates support for Ed. Foundation

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

A letter of support for the foundation going to the Heginbotham Trust to ask for money would link to the assumption the money will be used for a track, Kafka said.

Board member Kris Camblin said he would be willing to commit to the foundation to pursue a grant, but is not yet ready to commit to a track at the school.

Linda Jelden pointed out the timing for approaching the Trust is now, and she therefore supports the foundation in going for the grant and in earmarking the funds for a track.

However, Jelden added before the district commits to going forward, it will take a lot of information. She referenced discussion from two years ago which noted annual maintenance and track replacement in approximately 10 years as key financial concerns.

“We have asked for multi-year plans from transportation and technology, and we really need to look at those plans to see how it all fits together,” said Jelden.

Saying she wouldn't be opposed to having track funds, Jelden admitted she's nervous about what the dollars will look like in the next couple of years. She specifically cited the need for technology dollars and training support.

Miles pointed out the Heginbotham Trust's desire to support projects that last. Technology needs are disposable, and are not what the Trust typically awards money for. Kafka noted the second phase of the HVAC project would fall under the same category as technology.

Jeff Tharp said he feels it's a given to favor a letter of support for the foundation getting funds, but he doesn't want to commit specific district funds at this point.

Tharp supports the idea of replacing some of the funds (close to \$300,000) that were

Board contemplates support for Ed. Foundation

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

designated in the district's capital reserve fund for a track between 1996-2007. Those funds were used two years ago for a boiler project.

Tharp questioned how long the foundation can hold on to designated funds. Other similar questions will be routed through board member Kim Killin, who was called out of last week's board meeting on an emergency.

Expressing enthusiasm for the foundation this week, Killin cited its purpose is to assist in funding decisions and fund searching for projects for the school district. She emphasized elected officials are not allowed to serve on the foundation board.

Kafka pointed out having designated track funds with the foundation rather than the school district takes a lot of stress off the district. Tharp agreed the foundation is free to guide its funds as it sees fit, and it's much better than tying up school funds.

Jon King cited the long-range vision of potentially needing to seek taxpayer funding support. As a result, he said he is not in favor of putting money towards a track. While he sees the need for lighting at the football field, he doesn't favor the track itself.

King wants to have a grasp on costs and overall need for projects such as phase two of the heating and cooling project.

Early in the discussion last week, Supt. Miles noted if an independent foundation is going to request grant moneys for a project that goes to the school, it's important to give the foundation information regarding the school's feelings about the project.

Miles cited the huge upside of partnering with someone else, and noted the board's opportunity to work together with the foundation on a long-term basis.

While this is good timing in that the foundation is in place and local moneys are available, Miles

Board contemplates support for Ed. Foundation

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

pointed out it's bad timing in that there's not a clear idea of where the district will stand financially in six months.

Along this line, Miles said the district will look at long-term capital needs plans in January, inflation numbers for the school finance act will be received in February and the beginnings of the school finance act bill won't be seen until early March.

For the next Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) grant funding cycle, applications are due the first of April. Kafka noted it would take a lot of work to come up with a good proposal by April. He said he would be more prepared to support a track project if he had more details.

Miles said timelines would have to be running parallel to each other to have discussion in March, as it wouldn't be good to assume prices would be the same or in-kind commitment would come through as previously expressed.

Miles noted he hesitated to bring this up at all due to the board's action in March of 2008. At the same time, he said he thinks they would be equally criticized for not acting on this opportunity for funds that are available if applied for before the end of 2009.

Miles recommended the board approve a letter of support for the foundation's effort to pursue the grant funds to be designated for a track project.

Kafka said the issue two years ago wasn't necessarily opposition to the track project. Rather, it involved the uncertainty of financial times and the overall best use of money in the capital reserve fund.

Kafka added he spends half of his work time in Akron and has asked about their beautiful facility. He said the response indicates it's the result of a combination of several years and a lot of community support.