

# Community Roundtable: Operations, Maintenance & Transportation

Monday, December 13, 2010 - Discussion Questions

## Question 1: Competitive Funding

*If Governor-elect Cuomo moves forward with his plan for a competitive funding system for schools, in what areas do you believe Broodalbin-Perth should consider looking for “individual consolidations or recurring savings” that would meet Cuomo’s criteria?*

- **Possible services to consolidate**
  - Insurance
  - Software services
  - Purchasing, could district move toward cooperative purchasing
  - Could some programs be merged with Mayfield?
    - Possibly sports, college credit programs, central office functions, special education
  - Transportation
    - Outsourcing transportation brought up a few concerns: disciplining procedures for students on the bus, safety and security concerns
  - Special education transportation
  - Sports consolidation of smaller teams
  - Food service
  - Could we look at more distance learning opportunities to share/consolidate smaller classes?
  - Can we add classes to a school where attendance is lacking? Can we restructure to offer more through sharing (teachers, etc.)?
  - What effect would consolidations have on classroom experiences?
  - What is our capacity with existing facilities?
  - Will the new housing development push us out of capacity?
  
- **On the idea of merging B-P with another district**
  - Eventually we will all get to the point of consolidation.
  - We are moving toward county school districts.
  - Bigger isn’t always better.
  - How do you measure the worth – it’s not always about the money.
  - Need more information: How would a merger work, where would the students go, transportation issues, and geography makes it not feasible.
  - It costs a significant amount of money to re-invest in a merger – even with the incentives offered – is it just a wash?
  - How would it be done? More research is necessary.
  - People don’t want to lose the small close-knit feeling of BP
  - Who else besides Mayfield could the district merge with?
  - A merger is not a “quick fix.”
  - Would students who have to travel long distances as a result of a merger be safe?
  - If the schools become too big they lose their personality, and B-P has “personality.”

- A feeling of only wanting to merge if it is a real cost savings.
- Is Galway a possibility?
- **Other cost-saving ideas**
  - Ensuring the district goes out to bid on as many budget items as possible
  - Joining a coop
  - Limit the amount of paper used in classes
  - Parents/guardians could opt-in for paper communication from the schools
  - Set school printers to default to two-sided printing
  - Push RSS use through the website
  - Increase district recycling—could this bring in revenue?
  - Reduce water usage in the cafeteria—stop using trays—are there other efficiencies to consider?
  - Consider energy conservation measures
- **Additional questions and concerns**
  - What does Cuomo want us to look at?
  - Cuomo's idea may not even come to be
  - What would his plan specifically mean for B-P? What would B-P be eligible for?
  - A lot of our money comes with strings attached
  - Space impacts/emotions/ramifications of decisions should be considered
  - If Cuomo's proposal comes to be, the district would need a grants writer
  - Merging—would it be cost effective?
  - Is the amount of money that would be saved worth it?
  - Would all students' needs still be met?
  - Would districts that have already cut positions or consolidated services be judged differently through the criteria, would they be eligible for more grant money?
  - Most people are unhappy with their taxes but not with the district.

## **Question 2: Savings vs. Jobs**

*Which is more valuable to you – cost savings that could generate more state aid for the school district and thereby minimize effects on local school taxes OR maintaining jobs? Which do you believe the community values more?*

- **The district has a responsibility to look at all of its options, which includes the cost effectiveness of hiring outside vendors.**
  - Looking into outside vendors in regards to food service, buses, custodial services, etc. should be done every few years.
  - Everyone wants to preserve jobs but also save money.
  - Could outside vendors supplement as potential cost savings instead of replacement?
  - Could we hire locals, but at a lower wage?
  - Best is to look at ways to raise revenue instead.
  - Jobs are more important, as long as jobs are justified
  - Everyone is a multi-tasker so it's hard to cut by task
  - Don't want to cut a teacher for one year and then have to hire the position back.
  - People can't keep think they are going to lose their jobs, only to be hired back
  - Could we keep jobs, but cut back hours?
  - One group took a vote and was split:
    - We're a business, so we have to control costs—4 votes
    - We're part of the community, we have to keep jobs—3 votes
  - Cons of bringing in outside vendors
    - Bringing in an outside vendor can mean a loss of personal touch
    - If local people lose their jobs, the district could lose some of the tax base it draws from
    - Outside vendors could mean more turnover, less personal service
    - Outside contractors could = lost jobs
    - Only benefit may be cost savings—is this worth it?
    - We would lose programs if we lose personnel
    - Local control is important
    - Custodians are gatekeepers with vested ownership our buildings—would an outside worker have the same level of commitment to our buildings and students?
  
- **Possible places to look to use outside vendors**
  - Transportation for special education
  - Breakfast program—could this mean our staff could come in later in the day and one group would run the breakfast program?
  - Consolidate transportation with neighboring schools
  - Phase out drivers/buses as people retire or leave

- **Properly managing our money is important**
  - Hard to balance taxes with personal services
  - Community wants to save money.
  - Concern for those on fixed income and rising taxes
  - However, decisions should not be made based solely on money. People want to know the person driving the bus, etc.
  - “You get what you pay for.”
  - There may be an added “cost” to saving money by outsourcing.
  - If outside vendors are continually cheaper, ask why? What are they doing differently than B-P.
  - Pensions and health insurance are a big area of contention.

### **Question 3: Bus Stops vs. Door-to-Door Pick-Up & Drop-Off**

*Do you believe the bus stops in the village have worked well so far? Do you have any concerns about the bus stops? Do you believe bus stops could or should be established in other areas in the school district?*

- **Concerns about the bus stops**
  - Students waiting in cold or inclement weather
  - Safety issues
  - Behavior problems/bullying
  - Parents needing to monitor the stops
  - Many people are concerned about how they will work if there is a significant amount of snow.
  - Safety concerns with stop on 107—decided board will try to put a “bus stop ahead” sign to advise drivers
  - Children should never have to cross a road if bus goes both ways on the same road
  
- **Positives about bus stops**
  - Change is difficult, but people are accepting... not as bad as they thought it would be
  - The bus drivers are conscientious and watch out for our children
  - Helps commuters because they may not get stuck behind the buses
  - Bus stops are a logical choice – why stop at every house?
  - Decreased wear on buses, fuel savings, saves time
  - No reports of bad repercussions
  
- **Ways to improve the bus stops**
  - Could people wait for buses in village offices?
  - Could there be a way to opt in or opt out of bus transportation?
  - Coach kids on safety/behavioral expectations
  - Can we look at individual bus routes to evaluate if there are other areas where this would work as well?
  - Could collective stops be implemented? Students who live close together could wait in one driveway instead of each individual one.
  - Could a community survey be done on collective bus spots?
  - Can we ask other districts about collective spots and how they are chosen, liability issues
  - Could bus stops/shelters be built for bus pick-up/drop-off locations?
  
- **Other transportation ideas**
  - Would the state give money for BOCES to consolidate start times regionally so more districts could consolidate buses?
  - Some MA districts charge for transportation
  - State or regionally mandated calendars would save on transportation costs
  - Charge money for open gym time after school for students who do not want to take the bus

#### **Question 4: Going Green**

*Considering that there would be an upfront cost to getting the district “off the grid,” do you believe the community would support this type of project? What is your opinion of this type of project? Are there other ways of “going green” that you believe the district should consider?*

- **Types of “green projects” the district should consider?**
  - Wind turbine
  - Solar
  - Geothermal
  - Biofuel buses
  - Lights in buildings on timers/sensors
  - Low-flow toilets
  - T-5 lights
  
- **Obstacles to building one of these projects**
  - Wind turbine
    - Would it be cost effective? It could cost millions to build.
    - How long would it take to recoup the costs?
    - What aesthetic problems would a wind turbine cause?
    - Wind turbines can be noisy.
    - Where would it be located? (One suggestion of in the pines behind the baseball field/track)
    - Visual health could be a problem—“flicker effect.”
  - Solar
    - Takes longer to recoup money
    - Would it be cost effective before it is outdated?
    - NY weather conditions might not be the best for this
  - Geothermal
    - The upfront cost of this can be very expensive.
    - Can we look at Niskayuna’s project?
  
- **Questions the groups had**
  - What are the state regulations, etc. for wind turbines?
  - Can town ban wind turbines?
  - What would the maintenance costs be for any of these projects?
  - Can the district get grants for these types of projects—possibly from NYSERDA?
  - Could the district sell energy it produces to others?
  - Would GE work with us, sell advertising space?
  - Has NYSERDA ever done an energy study for B-P?
  - What other energy-saving products are out there?

- Can we explore new products?
  - Are we in a wind zone, etc.?
  - What is the initial investment vs. the savings?
  - Is the remainder of the cost (after incentives) aidable?
  - Are there grants available?
  - How long would it take to recoup the money?
  - Are there other schools we could look at who have done this?
- **General sentiment**
    - It seems like it would be a lot of money up front.
    - Education of the public would be very important
    - A lot of upfront costs, not sure if community would embrace without education
    - Investment in future
    - People already facing tax increases and state aid reductions are looming—it could be a lot of lost jobs to put money toward one of these projects
    - Building the fund balance is essential, would rather build fund balance than build new energy technology
    - Energy savings would have to be big for the community to support this
    - Community would NOT support at this time
    - Standby costs could be high, if the district is off the grid but needs to reach out to get power/gas, etc for outside company in case of emergency, the costs could be high
    - “Tough sell.”
    - Great idea
    - Green is more expensive up front
    - Cost benefit analysis should be done
    - Would take up a lot of space
    - Community wouldn’t necessarily support up-front costs
    - General feeling is that there needs to be much more information and investigation.
    - Group felt this is the most viable, attainable way to save money but also recognizes it would be the hardest hill to climb.
    - It is something that would keep the control in B-P’s hands.
    - The community would need to have a long-term vision and a clear understanding of the long-term benefits.
    - This would be a very hard sell because of the initial start-up money.