

The Special Meeting of the Meeker Town Board was held Tuesday, October 27, 2009 at Town Hall.

Members Present	Mayor	Etheridge
	Trustees	Halandras Cook Omer Strate
Members Absent		Mills Gerloff
Town Staff Present	Town Administrator	Day
	Town Clerk	Cook
	Town Attorney	Viscardi

Rio Blanco Herald Times Nikki Turner
Citizens Present
Karen and Phil Brown, Jeff Madison,
Steve Loshbaugh, Nettie Modlin, Jane Clugston
Doris Welle, Kai Turner, Brian Conrado, Mr. and
Mrs. Larry Beck, Ellene Meece, Donna Gutierrez, Mary
Ann Wilbur, Sparky Pappas, Bob Gutierrez, Kay Bivens

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Etheridge called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

ROLL CALL

All present except Trustees Mills and Gerloff.

Discussion – Meeker Elementary School.

Mayor Etheridge stated tonight's discussion would be the process the Board had discussed (at the workshop on October 20, 2009) on how to move forward on making a decision regarding the elementary school. She stated an idea was presented to form a work group who would help analyze and research the various possibilities presented at the October 6, 2009 meeting, to research possibilities that haven't been presented for the site that would eventually be presented to the Board for a decision. She felt the idea was plausible as some of the burden would be transferred from the Staff and Board to the work group to do some of the analysis and research that was necessary to have before a decision was made, and it might be a better forum for discussion as well as a forum to invite other resources to come and discuss suggestions and possibilities. Mayor Etheridge stated her thoughts regarding the formation of the work group were two things: 1) If this route (formation of a work group) was taken for the process of making the decision, her first concern was the group must have a very clear purpose or specific focus; a mission statement which could be worked out tonight, 2) Representation as to who should be at the discussions, specifically who would take on some of the burden of doing the analysis, data research and information gathering.

Mayor Etheridge stated the Board had three specific decisions to make: 1) Is this the way they want to move through the process? 2) Do they feel creating a small working group would be helpful and if so, what would they be doing, what is the focus/mission statement? 3) Who specifically would be involved? She inquired of the Board if this was the route they wanted to pursue? Trustees Cook and Halandras commented. Mayor Etheridge inquired if the public or Staff had any comments regarding the formation of a work group? Karen Brown 28902 County Road 8 asked how the work group would be formed, and would the Board pick the participants? Mayor Etheridge stated that would be the next step if the Board decided this was the direction to go. Steve Loshbaugh 890 7th Street stated he was present at the last meeting and passions were high. He stated he liked the idea of the

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work group, but could see it going many directions. He stated Mayor Etheridge had mentioned it would free up Staff's time, but Staff's assistance would be important, whether it entailed taking of the minutes or other tasks. Mayor Etheridge stated if a work group was the direction to go, it needed to be worked out tonight; how to contain the passion and channel it into productivity. She stated she understood the elementary school was a very passionate subject but people could use that energy to bring information to the table, as opposed to ideas.

Mayor Etheridge stated during the workshop four specific uses were discussed; 1) a justice center, 2) assisted living facility, 3) a multi-use facility, 4) or just raze the building and have open space. She stated they then asked the following questions: how does the public feel about it, would it be a good financial decision, would it be economically viable for the community and would it create synergy downtown? Mayor Etheridge stated the Board realized they couldn't answer many of those questions; "Because we don't know." She stated they don't know if it would be a good financial idea as the cost is unknown for razing a building to create a park, or if it would be economically viable to have an assisted living facility, due to lack of research. She stated the Board needed to step back, gather information and find resources to bring to the community to tell them how certain options would affect the Town in all ways possible. Mayor Etheridge added Staff does have some ideas for resources, including Mr. Rich Sales, as well as Patti Snidow from USDA who had funding suggestions/opportunities regarding downtown revitalization and would be resources to utilize. She stated the purpose of the work group would be to ensure their focus was informational, letting the Board deal with public opinion and heated discussions that might ensue between saving or removing the building. She added the Board would like to hear the information, but need the black and white of it. Mayor Etheridge stated public opinion is part of the decision, but another is to ensure financially responsible decisions are made and information was crucial, adding an example; to have an assisted living facility, how do they go about it, what is the funding availability, ownership, return on the investment, asking those types of questions.

Larry Beck 385 Park Avenue stated rather than hashing it out now about what to do with the school property, they should find out first if there will be site before they decide what to do with it. Trustee Halandras stated that was the idea for the work group and the basis would be "do they want a justice center where the school is?" "Do they want to use the property for a justice center?" Trustee Halandras stated public opinion would play into that and the Board doesn't want to make that decision right away, they want to ensure (through the process) the decision can be narrowed down. Phil Brown 28902 County Road 8 inquired if an assisted living facility would be Town owned and maintained? Mayor Etheridge stated his question was why the Board wanted to form a work group with the hope that the work group would relieve some of the burden and Staff would not be the only ones doing research. She stated there were questions the Board was not prepared to answer, and why the idea of a work group came up; to obtain the information to answer those questions.

Brian Conrado 449 Park Avenue stated economic viability had been mentioned several times, and when open space was created, a part of the town was preserved, attracting people because they like the atmosphere but the Town would have no way of calculating the economic return on it. Mayor Etheridge stated one of the values discussed was synergy; asking "how does the downtown block represent who we are as a community, and how does it fit in with the downtown area?" She stated Mr. Conrado was correct; those weren't measurable items, but for the measurable ones, the Board needed to know what the numbers are, as it would assist with the decision making process. She stated even the non-measurable (to an extent) would be measured the best way possible to have all the information the Board can gain before making a decision. Mayor Etheridge went on to thank Ellene Meece and Shonda Otwell (Meeker Chamber of Commerce) for putting out a survey to their members to gain additional information.

Nettie Fay Modlin 1023 Julie Circle stated another outlook for the Town to consider was need. She stated as an older person looking at assisted living in the future, the need was here. Ms. Modlin stated she didn't know if the Town would want to take on the need of an assisted living facility, but she was looking at the healthcare portion, and was something that depended on the medical needs of the community and the need was here. She added if she

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were to go out to try and obtain the research and information regarding an assisted living facility, she would need a professional with that specific knowledge. Mayor Etheridge stated that was the knowledge the Board was seeking, from outside sources so they have the knowledge. She added if they chose Option A, they need to know what were they missing out on with Option B, and to make sure the Board knows if they choose Option A versus Option B, what is it that they have not chosen versus what it is they have chosen. She stated they don't want to look back twenty years from now and say "that was the wrong decision," and this is why the process was taking so long and why it was necessary; so in the future, the Town can look back and say "yes, it was the right decision for the community because we surveyed the community, we spoke to the community, we looked at their needs and looked at the economics of it." She added economics would play into the decision but would not be the driving force.

Administrator Day stated as a Town, they need to commit to giving the work group the tools they need to make a decision. She added Ms. Modlin had stated she would not be able to obtain the medical information and those were items the Town Staff would be charged with finding. She went on to say an engineering study would probably have to be done so they would know if it was possible to keep the building and felt it was a commitment the Town needed to make. Mr. Loshbaugh stated Administrator Day's statement was correct; they need to know if the roof of the school was bad, or the foundation would crumble within a year, and was unsure if Mr. Sales could do that. Mayor Etheridge stated Mr. Sales had done some assessment, but was historical. Mr. Beck asked if an engineering study had been done by the school district? Mayor Etheridge replied not a full engineering study, and whatever studies they did for the building the Town didn't have. She stated the Board needed a full structural engineering study to determine what state the building was in; is it foundational and roof issues only; if it would be possible to reuse the building or demolish it using the site for another purpose. Mary Ann Wilbur 325 9th Street asked how the study was done on the School Administration facility? Mayor Etheridge stated Ms. Wilbur would need to ask the school board. Trustee Halandras added the Board didn't have say in what the school did, or how they did it, but it is known they don't have an engineering study. He stated they don't know and aren't making the decision as to where the justice center would be going as it is a County decision, and the Town could possibly fit into the decision by using the soon to be available property, stating there were ideas, hopefully with more to come.

Mr. Conrado stated the first thing is to obtain an engineering study on the building as all the discussion may be for not, especially if the discussion involved saving the present building. Trustee Halandras agreed stating it had been discussed but it was a \$20,000 - \$30,000 investment that the Board was unsure they wanted to undertake. Mrs. Brown asked if something was renovated, not having the engineers look at it, how long would the facility last? She added the Board spoke about 20-30 years and if the building won't last as long as a new structure, they would need to consider that when it needed renovated again or make this same decision again. Mayor Etheridge stated that was part of the reason why a structural engineering study was needed; to determine the remainder of life for the building, even after renovations. She inquired again of the Board if this was the step they wanted to take. Trustee Omer stated the work group would include specific governmental entities (to be defined), interested citizens, a timetable established to get through a scope of work and Staff assistance would be needed as well as various outside consultants. Trustee Omer stated if the building could be maintained, could it be utilized for some form of healthcare facility (i.e. assisted living), the answer could be different than if it was converted to office spaces or other future use and it might be more expensive to convert the building to a healthcare facility than office space; those answers are unknown. He added if they go beyond those, is there external funding, (i.e. historic preservation funds) in a significant amount that would enable the project and if not, what local resources would be available and what costs would the Town or the citizens have to deal with. Trustee Omer stated when the process began there were some known's and unknowns, but the reality is what the different alternatives cost and the funding sources that are available, stating he felt it would be good to move forward with the work group process; to bring progress reports back as needed with public review along the way. Trustee Cook agreed. Trustee Strate stated he liked the idea of a work group but expressed concerns regarding what happened if everyone in the group didn't have the same vision, which would need to be defined beforehand. He added there

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was a great deal of information to be obtained and a work group would play a vital role as long as the vision was clear. Trustee Halandras inquired of Trustee Strate what he meant in regards to the vision. He stated he didn't see the vision made until the group met and put the information together. Mayor Etheridge stated there is a difference between a vision and a purpose, stating a vision would be everybody thinking the same thing, a purpose is everyone working towards the same thing.

Attorney Viscardi stated given other scenarios where work groups were utilized, he didn't believe the work group determined the vision; they were there to determine what the Board determines what the call would be. He added in order to keep everyone on task, the Board needed to set perimeters about what they want to see the group doing, and then the group knows the Board has set a purpose and perimeters in which they need to work, and provided an example. He stated if the Board decided to do an engineering study because some citizens said there were lots of decisions but if the engineering isn't there to support it, then they may have spun their wheels and spent a lot of time to not be able to consider one or two of the options. Trustee Halandras stated he was not keen on work groups as the last one didn't go anywhere. Attorney Viscardi stated part of the reason was the group didn't have a focus and why it was important to set ground rules so the group knows what their charge is and isn't and it doesn't become too expansive.

Mayor Etheridge stated the second item she would like to accomplish tonight was to (if the Board moved forward with a work group) set the purpose and mission statement. She stated her vision for the work group would be informational as the Board needed information on how an assisted living facility worked, how much it would cost to renovate the building to specific standards or how much would it cost to demolish the building. Mayor Etheridge asked how they synergize that into saying the County is going to build the justice center here and at what point do those options and costs (information) overlap. She stated the work group won't be making recommendations to the Board for decisions but would be a group presenting information. Mayor Etheridge stated she didn't want a group of people debating the pros and cons about the opportunities for the site and then come to the Board and say "here is our recommendation." She stated the Board needed information and the work group was necessary to find funding sources, seek out resources, seek information on how to achieve these items and Attorney Viscardi was correct in stating an engineering study was something to move forward with sooner than later so the study would coincide with the work group's meetings and the more information obtained, the sooner a better decision could be made.

Mr. Loshbaugh stated he felt the engineer should evaluate more than just the structure; they should look at the options the Town could pursue on whether it was the assisted living facility, what would have to go into the asbestos abatement as opposed to offices and should be evaluated as part of the engineering study. He added a work group could offer ideas as to what the engineer should evaluate the building for (i.e. assisted living) as part of the structural engineering study and could then say "if it was going to be used for this, you can do this, and would cost this amount." Mr. Loshbaugh stated the data gathering in regards to the justice center, they wouldn't be able to go to the county architect to ask those questions as it isn't appropriate. He added he applauded the idea of a work group but would need a great deal of assistance. Trustee Halandras stated the structural engineer would come in and tell them that structurally an option would fit or it would give them the 30-year plan if they were to do anything. He stated the Town doesn't need an engineer to tell them about the electrical or mechanical as it is known to be obsolete, and any renovation of any type would be dealing with asbestos abatement throughout the entire building. Mr. Conrado stated not necessarily depending on how the renovation was done but needed to be found out, as it is hearsay. He stated the electrical depended on what the use of the building was and from what he heard, the building had fiber optics installed and the school had to go through asbestos to install it. Trustee Halandras stated it was for communications.

Mr. Conrado inquired of Kai Turner (RBC Commissioner) if the County would look at the site for moving their offices and to make the courthouse mostly a jail, renovating the courtroom and many people would like to see that happen. Mr. Turner stated the County had instructed their architect to put together different options, doing some of what Mr. Conrado suggested. He added the County had some accurate data regarding asbestos abatement for

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the elementary school. Mr. Turner stated when he was a member of the school board there were some presentations conducted with numbers, but there was not a structural analysis done. He stated were some comparative numbers (i.e. square footage analysis) on remodeling which placed it at \$5 million dollars (approximately), and the information recently obtained showed it to be fairly accurate. He reiterated the County was looking at options but have not heard back from the consultant, stating candidly the County was leaning towards an addition on the back of the current courthouse, but was not definite and could change. He stated they were looking at what the County could monetarily afford to do and felt they could afford to do what they presented and if not, they would do something else. Mr. Loshbaugh inquired of Mr. Turner if there was a timeframe, with Mr. Turner stating they would like to move forward at the beginning of the year (2010). Mr. Beck inquired if the information the school board had received was available to the Town Board. Mr. Turner stated for some reason the information has been hard to locate, stating he had made some calls but couldn't get anyone to reference the timeframe or retrieve the data. He stated there was a small booklet with comparative numbers, and knows some of the data could be useful. Mr. Turner stated he didn't know if there was an actual structural analysis on the building, as the needs of the school at that time were very different.

Ms. Wilbur stated Mr. Turner had said the County was thinking about beginning in January with their work on a new jail, possibly remodeling and asked how it would be funded and if there was a certain part of their budget where it came from? Trustee Halandras stated both questions were County related and asked her to take her questions to the Commissioners as they needed to hear her questions and she needed to hear their answers. He added they were here tonight to decide if they wanted to establish a work group and how to move forward, stating the justice center was another concept and the County's concept. Mr. Turner stated the information obtained from their consultant, he passed onto Mayor Etheridge, as well as Administrator Day and the County was sharing information, hoping it helped in the decision making. Mayor Etheridge stated that would be a crucial component of the work group; to find information and the Town's responsibility to find out what to do with the property. She stated if the County is next door and interested in the Town's property then there is a synergy taking place and the County needed to be at the table with the information so the best decision can be made on the best way for the County to go with their project and how it would coincide with the Town's project. She stated it may be one of the same or may be different, but felt it was a big part of the work group, trying to find out where information overlaps.

Mayor Etheridge stated in forming of the work group, a task she had was a structural engineering evaluation with the Board in agreement. Trustee Halandras stated he thought last week the Board had discussed checking with Mr. Sales to see if he had someone who could assist. Day stated she hadn't contacted Mr. Sales yet, but would. Mayor Etheridge inquired if the item could be placed on the next Board agenda and if Day would have the information? Day stated yes, it would be on the agenda if she could get the information by the next meeting. Ms. Modlin stated based on what she had heard, the Town would have to have a different engineer based on what was going into the building, asking whichever entity obtained the building a different engineer would be needed? Mayor Etheridge stated the Town wanted to have a structural engineer look at the structure of the building to tell them if the building was structurally sound and what the remaining life of the building was. Ms. Modlin inquired again that the study didn't include anything else; it just says the building was structurally sound? Mayor Etheridge stated that would be the basic and the Town may want to have the structural engineer look at possible options for renovation based on how it would be used. Trustee Omer stated a portion of the building could be structurally sound and maintained with a future use and possibly part of it wouldn't be, but he wasn't an engineer.

He stated the part that may not be structurally sound could be the basement but the question was if all the building could be retained and renovated for future use or if it isn't structurally sound for any future use, it's a different answer and the Town doesn't know.

Mayor Etheridge stated another task for the work group would be to research options for funding (i.e. historical funding) and the perimeters; what the funds are for, purposes used, other funding opportunities and what other resources are available. Jeff Madison 625 Garfield stated one of the first tasks should be to explore all the

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options and ideas, stating there currently were four and could think of three more viable uses, including combinations of uses, and not to narrow anything at this time. He stated while the engineering work was taking place, solicit additional ideas and combinations of ideas, adding some would get weeded out fairly quickly and felt the Town hadn't heard all of them. Trustee Omer concurred with Mr. Madison's statement, stating if the process was managed correctly, it could be done in a parallel track (doing the engineering study and obtaining other future uses). He stated the vision of the whole area has had good discussion and ideas but what hasn't been thought of, stating he would support moving on a parallel track.

Mrs. Brown inquired if the Board knew how many people they were looking for to participate on the working group, and where would they would be found. Mayor Etheridge stated as soon as it was solidified as to what the working group was for, she would like to move on to discuss who would be represented and how. She inquired of the Board if the tasks for the work group was acceptable; a concurrent structural engineering evaluation, and discover opportunities and perimeters for funding; to identify outside resources (i.e. USDA, Rich Sales, etc) and to explore and establish any additional ideas and combinations. Mr. Loshbaugh stated the timeframe component was missing. Mayor Etheridge stated a timeframe would be necessary so the focus wasn't lost. She stated the County had the desire to be ready at the beginning of 2010 and felt it was a good idea to complete the year with informational ideas, and if at the end of the year the Town looked at it and they still don't have enough information, she didn't see a problem in continuing but it would be considered at that time. Mr. Loshbaugh stated most of it could be accomplished in a meeting with Rich Sales and Patti Snidow. Various discussions from the audience and the Board took place regarding the timeframe, engineering study timeframe and re-evaluating how the work group is achieving its tasks at the first Board meeting in January .

Trustee Halandras stated Mr. Loshbaugh had commented on how the work group would come up with funding possibilities, maybe the Historical Society, but should have some venues, stating Mr. Sales would be a better source. Day stated the Town would have to find and schedule the speakers. Trustee Halandras stated the work group would be exploring the different ideas, how they would work together, etc. and bring the information back to the Board, and would be almost concurrent with what the Board would need. He added he is gun shy in regards to the last work group as it didn't really solve anything and everyone had their own venue. Mayor Etheridge stated she understood that Staff would still have to do a great deal of the work, but her hope instead of having just Board meetings to invite everyone to the meeting; to present information also. She stated it wouldn't relieve Staff of their work, but hopefully would invite other people to the table (i.e. County, Chamber of Commerce, and Historical Society) who might be able to contribute information.

Mr. Conrado stated this was an important issue to the Town and would take time, stating he didn't expect to get through this in just a few months, as everything should be studied. Mr. Loshbaugh stated he felt there was a big rush as the Town will have to start paying utilities on the building, effective when the school vacates. Mr. Conrado stated that wasn't his point, they were discussing something for January, a couple of months off. He stated whether it was March or April, it would be hard to do anything before the school year began in 2010. He went on to say he was referring to a few months, not two or three years; this was an important decision and deserved the care, attention and time to do it right. Mayor Etheridge stated that is why the work group is being formed, setting a time limit for the first meeting in January so they can see if it is working or if they need to take the group in a different direction, to re-evaluate the process to ensure they are getting the information they need.

Mayor Etheridge stated she would like to discuss who would be represented on the work group, with Mr. Beck asking when they talk about a multi-use center, would it be voted on by the Town? Mayor Etheridge stated she didn't know, but the reason for a vote of the people would be if the Town transferred ownership of the school land to the County or someone else, a vote is required to transfer the ownership of the land. Mr. Beck inquired if the people would have a say as to what use the building would be, with Mayor Etheridge stating no (vote). Mayor Etheridge stated for the work group, it was evident the Town be primarily involved. She stated they wanted to work closely with the County to ensure there is synergy between their project and the site, whatever it may be.

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Mayor Etheridge stated the Chamber of Commerce needed to be involved as they had already put forth effort to obtain ideas, opinions and feedback from members. She stated the Historical Society should be represented as they have some ideas as well as a stake in the downtown area. She inquired if the Board had any suggestions for specific representative entities. Mr. Beck inquired about a neighborhood representative, with Trustee Halandras stating he thought the idea was good, but they would need to come together on their own and have a representative. Mr. Beck clarified it would be one person representing the neighborhood. Trustee Halandras inquired if it was just the neighborhood, or the entire Town? Mary Ann Wilbur stated she wanted to know if there would be a representative allowed on the work group from a neighborhood group as it affects their property. Mr. Loshbaugh stated it was a good idea to have one person representing the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Madison suggested they have two or three citizens with an interest in the project, one of which could be a neighborhood representative, adding if the Town disenfranchises the people, it would be an upward battle the entire process and would be best to include them. Trustee Halandras stated there was a group of people with opinions who had attended recent meetings and those opinions count, but there were other people who could get information, form a group, work amongst themselves and bring it back to the Board. Attorney Viscardi used an example of zoning issues, stating the Town code had a defined boundary. He stated they could attach a boundary to the issue by defining what an immediate neighborhood was if they were to have a member/person from the neighborhood on the work group. Mr. Madison suggested the Town solicit Letters of Interest to obtain a mix of people. Trustee Halandras stated that was his point, letting the people put together their own group and as big as they want, with one or two people representing the group. Mr. Loshbaugh suggested the Board make the work group appointments at their next meeting, with Mayor Etheridge agreeing. Trustee Halandras inquired if the Board should solicit Letters of Interest/Invitations for representatives. Mr. Beck stated they could speak to the neighbors and have two names submitted, with one as an alternate in case the other was not able to attend, thus alleviating the need to solicit Letters of Interest. Mayor Etheridge stated that would work and would not disenfranchise any citizen from being a part of the group. She stated if there were two people who wanted their names submitted to Administrator Day by the November 3, 2009 meeting, to call or just come to the meeting.

Mayor Etheridge reminded the audience that the work group was to obtain information and discuss ideas, and in the end, it comes back to the public Board meetings, adding anyone can come to those meetings as they are open to the public. She stated hopefully with the formation of the work group, the Board had found an efficient way to obtain information so they could make a better decision. She asked for additional comments, adding the work group item should be added to the Board agenda for the November 3, 2009 meeting to finalize details, direct appointees to the work group, and schedule the first work group meeting. Mr. Loshbaugh inquired if the budget line item was mentioned for the engineering study for the next meeting? Mayor Etheridge stated that would be encompassed in the agenda item at the next meeting. Mr. Conrado thanked Mayor Etheridge and the Board for their time and listening to all their comments, questions and concerns.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Etheridge adjourned the meeting at 7:32 p.m.

Mandi Etheridge, Mayor

Attest:

Lisa Cook, Town Clerk