



River Valley Board of Education
River Valley School District
15480 Three Oaks Road, Three Oaks, Michigan 49128
www.RiverValleySchools.org

Regular Meeting: 7:30 p.m. Monday, May 27, 2008
River Valley Middle/High School Library

1.0 Call To Order

President Farhat called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. and apologized for the delay.

Members present: Michael Ehlert, William Farhat, Fred Knutel, Ronald Petro and Vickie Wagner.

Members absent: J.C. German and Steve Graziano.

Finance Coordinator Cheryl Capiak and Superintendent Schroeder were in attendance.

2.0 Pledge of Allegiance

President Farhat led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3.0 Approval of Agenda as Presented

Farhat said there would be a recommendation for the Assistant Middle/High School Principal position. He called for any additional agenda items. Moved by Petro, supported by Knutel, to accept the proposed agenda as presented. All Ayes. Motion carried.

4.0 Public Comment on Agenda

Farhat recognized former River Valley biology educator and cross-country coach Jim Veldman. Mr. Veldman asked to address the practice soccer field construction.

5.0 Approval of Regular Meeting Minutes of April 28, 2008 and Work Session Minutes of May 19, 2008.

Farhat said he had not thoroughly reviewed the May 19 Work Session minutes. Wagner suggested they delay approval of the May 19 minutes until the next regular meeting. Farhat asked if there were any additions or corrections to the April 28 minutes. Moved by Petro, supported by Knutel, to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of April 28, 2008. All Ayes. Motion carried.

6.0 Student Board Representative Report

A Student Board representative was not in attendance and a report was not provided.

7.0 Superintendent's Report

Farhat welcomed Superintendent Schroeder back to school and Schroeder said that he was glad to be back. Board members welcomed Schroeder back and expressed their appreciation to Finance Coordinator Cheryl Capiak, Interim Middle/High School Principal Wayne Warner and Administrative Assistant Brenda Brunke for assisting with additional administrative duties in Schroeder's absence.

8.0 Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

9.0 Correspondence

There were no items of correspondence.

10.0 Old Business

There were no items of Old Business.

11.0 New Business

11.1 Approval of Accounts Payable for May, 2008 and the Treasurer's Report for April, 2008

Farhat asked if there were any questions regarding the accounts payable for May, 2008 or the treasurer's report for April, 2008. Moved by Ehlert, supported by Petro, to approve the accounts payable report for May, 2008 and to accept the treasurer's report for April, 2008. All Ayes. Motion carried.

11.2 Head Coaching Recommendations for 2008-2009 Fall/Winter Sports Season

Farhat reviewed the Head Coaching recommendations for the 2008-2009 Fall/Winter Sports Season. Moved by Ehlert, supported by Knutel, to hire Shawn Gedert as Varsity Boys Basketball Coach, Shawn Beach as Varsity Boys Soccer Coach, Mark Foreman as Varsity Cross Country Coach and Alan Berget as Varsity Wrestling Coach. All Ayes. Motion carried.

11.3 Recommendation to Hire Girls' Head Varsity Volleyball Coach

Farhat reviewed the recommendation to hire Tia Roberts as the Head Coach for Varsity Girls Volleyball. Ms. Roberts was the former Junior Varsity Volleyball Coach under Jim Ragosta. Moved by Ehlert, supported by Knutel, to hire Tia Roberts as the Head Coach for Varsity Girls Volleyball. All Ayes. Motion carried.

11.4 Approval of 2008-2009 Elementary Student Handbook Changes

Farhat briefly reviewed the Elementary Student Handbook changes as presented by Elementary Principal Garry Lange at the May 19 Work Session. Moved by Wagner, supported by Petro, to approve the Elementary Student Handbook changes as presented. All Ayes. Motion carried.

11.5 Approval of 2008-2009 Middle/High School Student Handbook Changes

Farhat briefly reviewed the Middle/High School Student Handbook changes as presented by Interim Middle/High School Principal Wayne Warner at the May 19 Work Session. Moved by Knutel, supported by Ehlert, to approve the Middle/High School Student Handbook changes as presented. All Ayes. Motion carried.

11.6 Approval of 2008-2009 Athletic Handbook Changes

Farhat briefly reviewed the Athletic Handbook changes as presented by Interim Athletic Director Neil Carter at the May 19 Work Session. Moved by Knutel, supported by Wagner, to approve the Athletic Handbook changes as presented. All Ayes. Motion carried.

11.7 Administrative and Supervisory Contract Extensions

Farhat reviewed the proposed contract extensions as recommended by the Personnel Committee:

- Garry Lange, Elementary Principal = two-year contract
- Wayne Warner, Middle/High School Principal = two-year contract
- Cheryl Capiak, Finance Coordinator = two-year contract
- Robert Payne, Buildings and Grounds Supervisor = one-year contract
- Linda Weigel, Transportation Supervisor = one-year contract
- Teri Brown, Working Food Service Supervisor = one-year contract

Moved by Petro, supported by Knutel, to approve the administrative and supervisory contract extensions as presented. Schroeder noted that five days were added to Principal Lange's contract and that Wayne Warner would be the Middle/High School Principal rather than the Interim Middle/High School Principal.

Wagner called the question to approve the administrative and supervisory contract extensions as presented. All Ayes. Motion carried.

11.8 Middle/High School Assistant Principal Candidate

Superintendent Schroeder reported that an offer was made to and accepted by the Middle/High School Assistant Principal candidate. Board members agreed that the process for hiring personnel included a review and recommendation by the Board's Personnel Committee. The Board will act upon the position after it receives a recommendation from the Personnel Committee.

12.0 Items for Discussion Only

Farhat asked if there were any other items for discussion and Wagner commented on the graduation ceremonies. She noted the contrast between the condition of the gymnasium for graduation in 2007 and the current state. Wagner commented on how "nice" the gym appeared, courtesy of the hard work of all the volunteers last fall.

Farhat commented on the nice environment and said that the graduation ceremonies were well done.

13.0 Hearing of Persons Present

Farhat recognized former River Valley biology educator and Cross Country Coach Jim Veldman, who is also a District resident. Mr. Veldman presented over twenty photographs of the former cross country wooded area and the current construction site; each photograph was labeled. He also provided each Board member with a two-page letter, addressing the construction of the practice soccer field; the letter reflected his opinion that the clear-cutting of trees for the construction of a practice soccer field was irreparable and unnecessary.

Mr. Veldman said that while he worked at River Valley, he strived to protect that area and now that he was gone, it was destroyed. He said that once that cutting of trees was done, the area could not be repaired and that he felt sorry for those who would no longer be able to enjoy it. Mr. Veldman said that the current site of the Middle/High School was a former junkyard, which Knutel confirmed. Mr. Veldman said that at the time of the Middle/High School construction, there were concerns raised about placing a large public facility next to Warren Woods State Park, the only climax maple beech forest remaining in Lower Michigan, as many feared the school would encroach on the protected forest.

Farhat asked Mr. Veldman if he was suggesting the District had encroached on state lands. Mr. Veldman replied that "everything works together." He noted the area's poor air quality was a result of Chicago. Mr. Veldman said that the edge of the forest was destroyed and the function of that edge was gone. He explained that the woods would now have to have a new edge. Mr. Veldman noted the mayapples would soon die as they could not tolerate direct sunlight. He said his son Joseph, a River Valley graduate, was currently in Bolivia trying to stop destruction of the rainforest in that country yet we had destruction of forest on school property. He said that it was inexcusable, too late to fix and just a very sad thing. Mr. Veldman asked what policy the Board had in place to prevent such destruction and who had made the decision to clear that area.

Farhat said that no one had plotted the site in advance to make a representation to the Board and that the Board knew a practice soccer field was going to be constructed. Farhat said the intent was to make the school a "more friendly place" for the entire community, from kindergarten through high school. He said the goal of construction of the practice soccer field was to fit the back area, which is the athletic area, and the staff carried out those wishes. Farhat said he admitted he was guilty by not asking where that location would be and what would be destroyed to locate it. He suggested the District's mission statement could address minimizing the impact of such projects. Farhat said assumptions were made and the staff did clear the trees.

Mr. Veldman asked if the school had a blueprint of the entire area and commented that "the whole area had never been used for anything but mowing." He questioned why more area would be devoted to grass, requiring the additional expense of mowing, fuel and staff time. Mr. Veldman asked if the District would hold people accountable for their actions.

Farhat said that everyone had learned a lesson from this, that mistakes were made and the District would endeavor to ensure that this did not occur again. He noted Wagner was shocked because she did not know what was occurring and said that neither did he. Mr. Veldman asked if other areas for the practice field were discussed.

Farhat thanked Mr. Veldman for taking the time to address the Board about the issue. He said the District would try to repair the damage and replace some of the trees. Mr. Veldman said that if one looked at the area, this had been one of the most beautiful cross country courses anywhere. Farhat said the District would seek advise on what to replace and where. Mr. Veldman suggested that Chuck Nelson, Naturalist at Sarret Nature Center, be contacted. He noted Mr. Nelson had been to visit the area in 1978 to address the Board about the need to preserve the area adjoining the state park. Farhat said that the Board would endeavor to address this issue for future Boards and staff.

Superintendent Schroeder said the plans were to use a wood chipper for the limbs and keep the mulch at the school.

Buildings and Grounds Supervisor Robert Payne said that the soccer team was the only sports team that had to travel for practice sessions and as such the school was responsible for the students while en route. He said it was unfair for the soccer team to have to travel two miles away to practice when other sports teams had use of the main athletic area.

Farhat said that the current practice field was “torn up” because it was the only practice field and as such, was in constant use. Mr. Veldman responded that he had coached for 39 years and that one did not require a field of regulation dimensions to practice. Farhat noted the practice soccer field was not wider, but longer.

Vicky Pfauth introduced herself as the newly elected Board member who will take office July 01, replacing Graziano. She then asked to address the cutting of the trees. Ms. Pfauth said that she grew up in the area, that the woods behind the school had always been very dear to her and that she was very disturbed with the destruction. She asked what the Board was going to do to put a policy in place.

Farhat said the next step would be to put something in the District’s mission statement that would address such issues. He said that some would argue the loss of one tree was one too many.

Lorraine Veldman, a retired teacher and District resident, expressed concerns over the loss of rare and protected plant species, such as club moss, club cedar and ground cedar. She said she was shocked with the first cutting of trees and when she returned a week later, another acre was clear cut. Mrs. Veldman said that “it was gone” and had been a “truly beautiful, biological gem.”

Buildings and Grounds Supervisor Robert Payne said the area had probably been leveled during construction of the Middle/High School. He said the trees were mostly cottonwood. Mr. Veldman interjected that a 90-foot tulip, wild cherry, elm, ash, silver maples and other varieties of trees were cut and that the ground covers were destroyed.

Wagner asked if they intended to chip all the wood, including the large trunks such as the 90-foot tulip. Petro asked Wagner what she proposed and Wagner replied she had no idea. She said that forests and woodland wildlife needed trees decaying on the forest floor. Farhat asked Wagner to get back to the Board with a recommendation on the best use of the downed trees and suggested she contact River Valley science teacher Mike Latus and Mr. Veldman as resources. Farhat said they would continue work and complete placement of the field.

Interim Middle/High School Principal Wayne Warner reported that the Middle/High School Marching Band had performed over the weekend at New Troy and Galien. He said that the Band was well received at both venues.

Interim Middle/High School Principal Wayne Warner reported the River Valley Softball Team had won their pre-district game, but the Boys Baseball team had lost their game.

Farhat noted that Mr. Warner was no longer Acting Superintendent and that with Mr. Schroeder's absence, "everyone was just wonderful and everyone stepped up to the plate." On behalf of the Board, Farhat thanked the staff for their assistance during the Superintendent's absence.

Jim Veldman said he was sorry to see the bond proposal that would close the Chikaming campus and that he blamed Schools of Choice for the loss of students. Schroeder said the area needed jobs and affordable housing to attract more families to the District.

14.0 Adjournment

Moved by Knutel, supported by Ehlert, to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 p.m. All Ayes. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Vickie Wagner, Secretary