

Murray City Municipal Council Chambers Murray City, Utah

The Municipal Council of Murray City, Utah, met on Tuesday, the 29th day of May, 2007 at 6:00 p.m., for a meeting held at Woodstock Elementary School, Multipurpose Room, 6015 South 1300 East, Murray, Utah.

Roll Call consisted of the following:

Krista Dunn,	Council Chair - Conducted
Pat Griffiths,	Council Member
Robbie Robertson,	Council Member
Jim Brass,	Council Member
Jeff Dredge,	Council Member

Others who attended:

Daniel Snarr,	Mayor
Jan Wells,	Chief of Staff
Michael Wagstaff,	Deputy for Legislation
Frank Nakamura,	City Attorney
Carol Heales,	Recorder
Gil Rodriguez,	Fire Chief
Peter Caroon,	Mayor, Salt Lake County
Bill Anderson,	South Salt Lake City Council
Citizens	
Board Members	Murray Board of Education
Tim Leffel,	Business Administrator for Murray School District

A. Neighborhood Meeting Presentation

Ms. Dunn opened the meeting, and made introductions. Ms. Dunn stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss smaller school districts legislation and how it affects Murray City residents living in the annexed area and attending Granite School District schools. She said the Council must make a decision as to whether or not to be an interlocal participant with Holladay, South Salt Lake, and Unincorporated Salt Lake County to decide, by vote, if the entities should form a smaller school district. Each entity's governing body must decide whether or not to participate by July 26, 2007.

Ms. Dunn presented Murray City's options and the possible outcomes from each of the options, using a visual flow chart diagramming the issues and the effects of Senate Bill 30.

Ms. Dunn turned the time over to Mr. Wagstaff, Deputy for Legislation, for further discussion on the legislature's possible solutions to equalizing property tax issues across the County and State.

B. The purpose of this Neighborhood Council Meeting is to:

Discuss Smaller School Districts Legislation and how it affects Murray City residents living in the annexed area and attending Granite School Districts schools.

Mr. Wagstaff noted, in response to a question on funding, that there is a special task force underway that is looking at this subject, specifically the portion of the property tax that is capital outlay for the schools. Currently, the County "pooling" idea is on the back burner, and legislators are looking at the State to pool funds for distribution. How and where that money would be distributed is still unknown.

Ms. Dunn interjected, stating that what they have been looking at, is basing fairness of property taxes and equalizing against growth, noting that all of the east-side loses if it is based purely on growth. The projection was a 21 student increase by the year 2020; that not being a large number. The first thing Murray City believes is that people should have representation. The Legislature has determined that your representation, if you live in the east part of Murray City, is the Murray City Council. It then becomes the school districts issue after assimilation. The legislators have taken any of the decision making capabilities out of the school district hands. Residents in the annexed area in Granite School District, which has no say in this matter. The Council is to make the decision which in their opinion is not fair representation. In addition, Granite students being bused from Taylorsville to Cottonwood High School, which makes up for more than 50% of the student population, have no representation.

B. Questions of the Public

Mr. Curtis (address not audible)

Mr. Curtis posed the question of what would happen to the schools and the enrollment. He wanted to know if schools would be closed due to enrollment changes. He said, currently, Murray has only one high school that is supplemented by the tax payers. Now there are annexed areas with high schools that are not in Murray's tax base. There are four high schools on the East side;

what happens if Cottonwood High School remains an island? Could the other district close down this school if enrollment drops, and what happens to the students that are living in the annexed area.

Ms. Dunn explained that the annexation includes the facilities and buildings.

Mr. Curtis expressed concern that regardless of who owns the property, it is still in the other school district.

Ms. Dunn stated that unfortunately, there isn't anyone that can answer these questions at this time. Once the re-districting is completed, that will determine which schools will remain open. The City has only two options at this time. The focus of this meeting was to discuss what the results of those two choices would be. All of the school boards will ultimately hold meetings and get public opinion on these issues, but at this point, no one can say if one district or another will close Cottonwood High School.

Ms. Maureen Brown, 5310 S Revere Drive

Ms. Brown asked how this issue began.

Mr. Wagstaff explained that two years ago, a bill was introduced by Senator Carlene Walker which allowed the change and started the process.

Ms. Dunn said she could only speculate that after a few schools were closed, and the people living in those areas felt that they did not have representation, they decided they wanted to have smaller districts so that they would have the representation that they needed.

Ms. Yvonne Christensen, 6568 Lombardy Drive

Ms. Christensen stated that as a long-term district employee, she felt caught in the middle of these issues. The employees are very concerned both about the students, and also for their own jobs. It is not only an issue for the teachers. They would rather see these schools improved and made use of, rather than have them closed which doesn't resolve anything.

Ms. Dunn stated that the district does have to consider all of the employees, along with the students when making their decision. The assumption by many is that we are not losing students across the valley, and they have to be assimilated somewhere, but in terms of being able to stay where they were, it does not look promising when given the fact that there are fewer students than what warrants keeping some buildings open.

Mr. Don Yates, Cottonwood Heights

Mr. Yates stated that he has attended several random meetings, and felt that citizens are being dictated through the State legislature on what they think they have to have. His point to the Council was that we need more districts under one roof, one school district for Salt Lake County. He said we have five district offices in the County, all duplication of each other. He felt if they went the way of California, Las Vegas, etc, who have overwhelmingly large districts, but save money to keep schools open and equitable. He felt as tax payers, we should be able to provide busing for the students, and provide equal schools for every city. These other cities make it work with taxes based on a property tax rate that is fair, and he does not see why Utah can not do the same. He also felt that the tax rate needs to be adjusted, and wondered why the elderly still pay school taxes. He said he would like a third party to come in and review this because it would show duplications that are unnecessary and costly.

Mr. (not audible)

Mr. (not audible) stated that this was his daughters last year at Twin Peaks Elementary. He wanted to know where his daughter would go to Jr. High School if they go with the new school district, or assimilate into the Murray School District.

Ms. Dunn commented that at this point, all that they know is that the Murray City School District's Jr. High School can assimilate those children, but cannot say which school they would attend. If they went to the new district, the likelihood would be that they would stay with Bonneville Jr. High, or one of the others, depending on which ones stay open.

It was asked how many Jr. Highs are in Murray City. Ms Dunn answered that there are two in the Murray District.

Questions were raised regarding how this issue will affect the East Side. Ms. Dunn stated that it will continue as it has with Granite District, until these issues are resolved.

Ms. Luisa (not audible) 534 E 4800 S

Ms. Luisa (not audible) asked what plans have been made to address the financing of the schools.

Ms. Dunn noted that if this area was to be put into Murray School District, the District assimilates the cost of the education of the students. She believed it

would be a difference of approximately 60 students per Jr. High, which would not impact the school district too severely. She added that if Murray High School inherits Cottonwood High School, more than likely, one of the schools would need to close. She felt that since 65% of the population of Murray High School lives west of State Street, assimilating 350 more students would still mean that less than ½ of the population would come from the east side. But, she added, the question of what would happen cannot be answered at this time.

Ms. Dunn stated that in terms of property taxes, no one on the east side stands to do better by equalizing, because there is so much of a need on the west side. If a state-wide equalization were done, the likelihood is that the taxes would be higher on the east side. But that would happen whether or not Murray picks up the annexed east side. She said there are all kinds of issues that have not been thought through yet and will need to be addressed later.

Caitlin Smith, 921 Peak Circle

Ms. Smith asked if those 300 east side students are assimilated into Murray High School, then what happens to the Taylorsville students?

Ms. Dunn said they would have to be assimilated into other Granite schools. Taylorsville High would not be able to accommodate 850 more students.

Darrell Thorser, 1732 (not audible)

Mr. Thorser asked for clarification as to whether this meeting was to determine whether Murray participates or not. If so, his feeling was to not participate. He would rather have people pushing for this change be held accountable.

Sherry Thorser, 1732 (not audible)

Ms. Thorser asked the School District to consider, if the Council chooses not to participate, combining Murray High School and Cottonwood High School facilities and turn it into a super Junior High School.

Laura Baker of the Murray School Board answered that the issue has been discussed at length, and said that this issue is a difficult one. With the brand new high school that the students are currently attending, to then have them go to another school would not be easy. All options will need to be looked at. Another issue to be addressed is busing of the students, including the west side students attending the east side. The current high school is centrally located.

Mr. Bill Finch, 1055 East Chevy Chase Drive

Mr. Finch expressed his opinion that it is a fallacy to assume that the tax issue will save money for either side such as the administration costs, duplication of maintenance services, lunch programs, etc. He also felt that it was unfair that the entire school district does not get to vote on the issue, as it will affect the west side whether it is Murray, Taylorsville or West Jordan. This will not help our taxes at all and we should all speak to our state legislatures regarding the issues.

A resident in the audience asked that the Council decline to participate.
Ms. (not audible) 6568 Lombardy Drive

Ms. (not audible) said she had concerns that Murray schools have the needed programs for special needs children. She asked that the Council opt out of this decision too.

Ms Dunn stated, on Murray School Districts behalf, that when this discussion started, the one thing that was brought up repeatedly during discussions was that others wanted to start up a district like Murray's district, and use it as a model.

Laura Baker, Murray School Board Member

Ms. Baker said that when this area was annexed into Murray, the Board met with the residents, and the majority chose to stay with Granite School District. She said this arrangement has remained until now. She felt that moving children has a major effect upon them. She felt the school board has the children's interest at heart, and will do what is best for them. The first group of people needing to make a decision will be the City Council; the group here today will need to help them decide.

Ms. (not audible) 5558 Brekenridge Dr

This member of the audience felt the major issue was a service issue. She felt that everyone should talk to their legislators and let them know what happened to this group of people. One of the issues is the Special Education programs. She felt the larger districts have more opportunity to build programs. She said there are strict laws for these programs and there are many examples of them, especially Vocational Education programs that serve students in both Murray and Granite school districts. She also noted that people should not be afraid of losing access to programs in either area.

Bob (not audible) 49(not audible) 938 East

Mr. (not audible) stated that what they should be concerned with is whether or not they can vote on this issues tonight. If they do not vote, then they can create a district however they chose to without input. It should be on the November ballot. He felt if the Council opts out, then we end up with no vote. He felt the residents need to voice their opinions.

Ms. Dunn stated that many of these people have not been given the opportunity to speak up and voice their opinions. She said the City has been assured by the Superintendent of the School District, that they are capable of handling the number of students, whatever the outcome, and will educate them well.

Mr. Mark Chuland, 1702 (not audible) Circle

Mr. Chuland stated that his concern is that the Murray School District states that if option two happens, they can handle it, but there has been no study that he knows of that specifically addresses how this will be done. He wanted to know what exactly will be done with the east side and provide the City with a solid plan before bringing it in front of the Council for a vote.

Ms. Dunn explained that the School District has studied these issues, and are looking at all of the issues that they will need to address in assimilating the students if and when they come. She said they have had numerous meetings with the School Board about these issues, and studies are ongoing to look at the options available.

A gentleman in the audience said outside of what is currently the Murray School District within the affected area, regardless of what happens, we are stuck with it. He felt if there are not sufficient funds, then there should be a negative vote and leave things as they are. He wanted to know if that could be done.

Ms Dunn remarked that there are 3-4 thousand students within a population of 65,000. In order to come with a negative vote, the majority vote would need to vote against the new school district.

The question was posed, that if on option two, Murray opts out, would the people that are affected be allowed to vote?

Ms. Dunn replied, no, they would not get to vote She said the parents of the 350 students currently attending Cottonwood High would not have a vote. She said that is why the Council is here tonight to discuss the two options.

A member in the audience asked if a jurisdiction decides not to participate, would that kill the issue and leave things to remain the same?

Ms. Dunn responded by saying that, if the County decides not to participate, or Holladay City, or South Salt Lake, it is a done deal. Murray's population does not represent a majority. She suggested talking to Salt Lake County Council members who represent Murray.

Janice Hammond, State Board of Education

Ms. Hammond stated that during the State Legislation, Senator Hatch had asked her to find out how the people felt about Cottonwood High, and what the issues are. She stated that Murray District is a great model, research shows that a good district has less than 25,000 students. She added that there is also great support in Murray and the district is in a great position. In her area of Holladay, they are interested in having the same type of district. The numbers of people represented in their area on the school board is less than half. She felt that when there are issues, it is difficult to represent their population. She also noted that one suggestion that they had received was to look at Cottonwood High School as a branch of the Salt Lake Community College, which could be an interesting idea to look into.

Ms.(not audible) 5750 S 2400 E, East Millcreek Township, Chairman of Cottonwood High School Community Council

Ms. (not audible) noted that there has been a great deal of research that demonstrates that there are huge districts in this country that are outrageously successful. She also mentioned that no matter how things progress over the next few months, if we could get five members of the Salt Lake Council to keep this off of the ballot in November, it would be all it takes to give us more time to consider all of our options, and time to review the huge implications of this change. She felt it was important for the students, for the employees from teachers to custodians, and for the property tax issues to study the implications.

Connie Anderson, 602 E 3635 S, Salt Lake City

Ms. Anderson stated that this is an emotional issue for all, and she can appreciate how people feel about Granite High School, but as a teacher there, she has a vested interest in this issue, and felt we should all work together.

Ms Dunn stated that as a Council, they understand the emotional issues involved here, but as a Council they need to make a decision based on what is best for all of the students in Murray.

Ms. Carrie (not audible)

Ms. Carrie said she teaches in the area, and her biggest concern is for the

students. She is worried about losing money if they are moved from the west side to the east side?

Ms. Dunn answered that not everything was considered, and the legislature is looking at some type of equalization plan, state wide, but she has not yet seen it.

Linda Lewis, 6251 Rodeo Lane

Ms. Lewis said she is concerned that only a few people get to vote on this issue. If so, then the laws need to be changed. She felt that if you are a tax payer, either with children attending now or not, you should have the right to vote on how your taxes are being used. Whatever is decided, everyone should have the chance to vote.

Ms. Dunn addressed the issue by saying that every petitioner in the annexed area was educated regarding certain services that they would not receive if coming into Murray. This included school issues; many times after the annexation people addressed the Council asking when they would get these services, and it was explained that these were services that may never be included. In the end of all the studies and discussion, the Council intends to vote, not just for what is best for Cottonwood students, or just Woodstock students, or Murray Students. They will take into account the entire Murray City area and make their decision based on that. Based on the history of this Council in this community, they try very hard to hear all of the residents and do their best to make the best decision. She encouraged the residents to continue voicing their needs and thoughts to the Council.

Mr. Dredge, City Council

Mr. Dredge said he listened to all of the concerns, and noted that they are all valid concerns, and many may seem unfair. However, in the end, the Council has to follow the law; and currently we only have the two options available. He asked for a show of hands to determine what the audience would like the Council to do.

A straw vote was taken.

Option One (to participate): very few hands shown.

Option Two (to decline to participate): majority of hands shown.

Ms. Dunn explained that they would stay behind to answer any additional questions, and that there will be no action taken at this meeting.

Meeting adjourned.