

## **Committee looks at energy efficiency of school facilities**

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Thursday, 08 March 2012 18:52 - Last Updated Thursday, 08 March 2012 18:54

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**By Sheri Hink**

### **The Wauneta Breeze**

The Wauneta-Palisade school board asked area residents to form a volunteer advisory committee to discuss W-P school facilities.

Committee members invited by the board consisted of community members including parents of current students, past students, Wauneta and Palisade residents as well as those new to the community and long-time residents.

The ad hoc committee was established to serve for one day only, last Thursday, when they met to review findings of a review of the energy efficiency of the two attendance centers as completed by the energy services company Trane.

Trane, one of four energy efficiency companies in Nebraska, was selected by the school board to work with the W-P schools to implement facility improvement projects.

The goal of the projects is to improve the learning environment for students and reduce energy costs at the two locations. The school has been working with Trane for approximately one year.

To this point, Trane has provided three services to W-P schools. They have conducted an energy analysis, building audits and made recommendations to the school board on how to improve the learning environment and energy costs at the two attendance centers.

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### **Energy Analysis**

The Wauneta Attendance Center was originally built in the 1930s and since then has made additions to the building in the 1950s and in 2010. The windows at the attendance center were redone in the 1970s and 1980s. The 55,000 square foot facility has annual utility costs of over \$80,000. The yearly utility cost per square foot is \$1.52.

The Palisade Attendance Center is slightly older than the Wauneta Attendance Center as it was built in the 1920s. Additions were made to the Palisade Attendance Center in 1926 and the 1950s. The approximate square footage of the facility is 33,000 with annual utility costs of over \$45,000 or \$1.40 per square foot. W-P Superintendant Dr. Stan Sibley explained that the higher per foot energy cost in Wauneta's Attendance Center can be attributed to the year-round usage of the building as well as the evening events that take place in Wauneta.

### **Building Audits**

Trane performed a building audit at each location as part of its services to the W-P Schools. These audits consisted of an evaluation of each facility from a building systems perspective. Using this perspective Trane evaluated the following items at each facility:

- Site issues,
- Building envelope,
- Interior systems,
- Service systems,
- Life safety systems, and
- Barrier free standards.

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### **Recommendations**

Trane provided several options to the school board when it presented the findings of the facility study.

It was determined that the Palisade Attendance Center needs several upgrades in order to bring it up to current standards. Trane provided three scenarios to achieve the needed upgrades at the Palisade Attendance Center.

The first scenario consists of renovating the current facility to current standards. If the needed upgrades were made to the current facility they would come with a \$2 to \$3 million price tag and it is unknown if the facility could support all the needed upgrades.

The second scenario names renovation of the gym and replacing the school building with a new stick-built facility.

The third scenario recommended for the Palisade Attendance Center consists of renovation of the gym and utilization of temporary portable classrooms, also known as pods, until the school board can come to a decision on the best long-term option for the school.

Dr. Sibley emphasized that the school board recognizes the importance of maintaining school facilities in both Wauneta and Palisade.

The third scenario presented at the meeting would allow for a speedy upgrade to current standards whereas the other scenarios, especially the first, would take much longer. If it is decided to build a whole new school structure in Palisade it would require a bond issue to be approved by voters.

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The energy services company recommended less expansive upgrades to the Wauneta Attendance Center. Their report sites the need for improvements to the windows, doors and tuckpointing the mortar. The report also recommends mechanical upgrades to the building and upgraded lighting throughout the facility. The needed upgrades to the Wauneta Attendance Center are estimated at \$1 million.

“Adding energy efficiency measures to improve the learning environment such as lighting, fresh air, getting rid of drafts and the ability to maintain a consistent temperature are all things that we know improve learning,” Dr. Sibley explained.

Dr. Sibley went on to explain that the upgrades to the Wauneta Attendance Center could feasibly be completed over the summer in time for the start of the 2012-2013 school year and would not likely require a bond issue. He explained that the school board could utilize a Qualified Capital Purpose Undertaking Fund (QCPUF), basically a short term loan, to borrow money to make the improvements to the Wauneta facility.

Dr. Sibley stated that research is very clear that the issues the school board is looking at have a significant impact on learning.

The facilities study findings and results of the ad hoc committee meeting will be discussed and possibly acted upon at the regular school board meeting on Monday, March 12. School board meetings are open to the public.