

School board hears appeal to maintain ag program

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Wednesday, 05 March 2014 17:57 -

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

The Wauneta-Palisade school board held a special meeting Wednesday, Feb. 26 at the Wauneta Attendance Center. The agricultural program and surplus property were discussed at the public portion of the meeting. The board then went into executive session to discuss personnel issues.

Ag program

WP ag instructor Marilyn Houdek attended the school board meeting to provide board members with an update on the ag program, appeal to them to keep the ag program intact and to provide a sketch that detailed ways to keep the ag classes in the current ag building as well as accommodate the district's two coach buses.

The board first discussed possibly moving ag classes to the main building and using the current ag building as the bus barn at the board planning retreat in January 2014. In September 2013 it was reported it cost the district \$10,122 to heat the ag shop the previous year.

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Houdek explained her primary rationale for finding a way to make the shop work for both ag classes and the buses was to continue to offer welding to WP students.

“In my opinion if we cancel welding we will lose students,” Houdek explained on a handout given to board members. “I have talked to people in the community and they feel we need to train students to be employable after graduation.”

Houdek’s plan entailed installation of an overhead door, already owned by the district, to allow the buses to be driven into the building. She also suggested building a wall to keep the bus side of the building separate from the classroom side.

Her plan would provide a bathroom on each side of the division, both unisex bathrooms. It would require installation of a new sink with an eyewash station to be installed on the classroom side of the building. She suggested storing metal outside under a tarp or building a small lean-to for metal storage.

She suggested moving the present stick welders into the southwest corner of the shop. She said there is enough room to store them, even if needed they could cut back to having two or three stick welders.

Under the scenario, Houdek said it would be helpful to install a small garage door to bring the steel and larger projects into the shop.

She suggested looking into an alternate source of heat for the classroom side of the shop, such as used oil, corn, etc. She also thought there might be grant funding to help finance the alternate heat source.

Houdek also provided board members with ideas to possibly save money while keeping the ag program and FFA active at WP. She told board members interest in the currently offered woods class has fallen off. She felt the class could be offered in the first and fourth quarters when it is warm and the shop would not need to be heated. She thought the district could instead offer a life skills class teaching wiring, drywall repair and “other skills the students will need when they

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get out in the world.”

Houdek said the community has been very supportive of the ag program and its students. She told board members there are currently five schools in the state starting new ag programs. She said the university is having difficulty turning out students quickly enough to fill the void.

In her address to the board Houdek told board members she feels there are a number of younger students interested in ag classes, therefore she anticipates higher numbers in upcoming years.

Houdek also told the board that several students have been approached by a neighboring school. She told board members these students told her they would transfer out if ag classes were cancelled. She also pointed out that the ag education program is currently the only career pathway offered at WP to satisfy the requirement under the Perkins Grant.

“I am appealing to you to keep the program for the students of Wauneta-Palisade High School. I feel it is a worthwhile area of study for the students who take the classes,” Houdek stated on her handout and presentation to board members. “There is a certain group of students who need hands-on learning opportunities and this program offers them the opportunity. They also learn employable skills and knowledge.”

Surplus property

WP Superintendent Randy Geier told board members he has been approached by an individual interested in purchasing the old score boards at the Palisade Attendance Center. The request spurred a conversation of several surplus property items held by the district including old score boards from Wauneta and several air conditioners.

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Board members discussed the possibility of offering the items on a closed bidding process or taking them to an upcoming public auction.

Board members stated they have tried offering items via closed bid before with little success. They plan to research the possibility of sending them to an upcoming auction by Fanning Auction Service. They plan to make a decision on what to do with the surplus property at the next board meeting.

Executive session

The special school board meeting began at 5 p.m. MT. After the ag program and surplus property discussions the board voted to enter into executive session to discuss personnel issues at 5:30 p.m. MT. According to the board's meeting minutes they returned from executive session and adjourned the meeting at 7:52 p.m. MT.

Two community members attended the special meeting. The Wauneta-Palisade school board's regular meeting date is the second Monday of each month. The next meeting is currently scheduled for 5:00 p.m. MT/6 p.m. CT Monday, March 10 at the Wauneta Attendance Center. School board meetings are open to the public.