**RSU #16 School Board**

**Operations Report**

John Hawley, Director of Operations

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**FACILITIES**

There used to be a day when facilities with high-pressure boiler systems required a licensed or certified operator. Although unsure when the law changed, Maine did away with that requirement for low-pressure boilers. And it was about that time the school departments did away with requiring that of their personnel as well. Unfortunately, this has done a disservice to most school districts because there isn't a person on staff with the technical expertise to operate the HVAC systems. I asked the other Education Plant Management Association members to see if any schools still have staff with boiler operator licenses. Although the response was minimal, no schools had this requirement. However, it is very evident in our district that our boilers are in the condition that they are because we need the expertise to operate the boilers safely and efficiently. I am not recommending an expensive contracted service but a staff person who can physically look at our heating plants daily. While I was on medical leave, we had Gary Purington fill in for me. With Gary's decades of experience in our school district and his knowledge of our buildings, he was an invaluable tool to the district in my absence. And because we have three custodial positions open, we have kept Gary on part-time to help catch up on some of the deferred maintenance items. And until I can find full-time people to fill our vacancies, I plan to keep Gary on for as long as possible to continue to help wherever is needed. There is a need for a floating-type position for somebody like Gary, with his knowledge of facility operations, to assist our school maintenance staff.

We have allocated $100,000 of ESSR Funds to cover the cost of an MCS generator, which I will now be putting out for bid. The generator will be bid in two ways. One would be for a unit that would run the whole school, and the second would be just to run essential services. Essential services include power to the kitchen's refrigeration, freezer, heat, and hot water. Neither the generator at Elm Street nor Poland Community runs the whole school in the event of an outage, but the high school and middle school generator does power the entire school.

With all good intentions, a handicapped chair lift was purchased and installed at Elm Street School to assist a wheelchair-dependent student with access to the classroom on the stage. That project was unfortunately taken on without consulting the appropriate authorities and is not legal. It is a residential unit not licensed for school use, was not installed by a professional lift company, did not have any electrical work inspected, nor was the lift permitted or inspected by the State. We have been in close contact with the State, and the lift will be removed. We plan to sell it as a used unit to recoup some expenses ($6,200+/-). This leaves us with no lift for that student. In the interim, we are constructing a temporary ramp allowing access to the classroom. We have been offered a used commercial lift from the town of Bridgton at no cost. However, the associated installation charges would be our own. The new unit is larger than the residential unit and cannot be placed in the same location. This lift would be appropriate for the school and could be licensed accordingly. The temporary solution would be in place to allow for budgeting for the installation and the estimated cost, which we are still working out.

You may have heard that the heating at Elm Street School has been excessive over the last couple of months. And that would be true. The heat exchanging coil that has failed at Elm St. is in the position which allows the heated hot water to continue to flow through the 1982 edition of the building. We feared it had failed in the opposite position, which wouldn't allow water to go through and, therefore, would not have enough heat in that part of the building. The biggest concern was that folks would see classroom windows open in November and December during the heating season, but it is our only means of temperature control in those classrooms. I spoke with Siemens, and that heat exchanger coil that was supposed to be here in November will likely be here in the middle of December. The good thing is that we know there will be heat in that portion of the building, and we won't have any freezing issues while we wait for the part to be replaced.

Most will have never noticed, but if you are standing at the Adult Ed Entrance at Elm Street and looking at the playground, the lower left corner of the fenced area appears to be sinking. That area has actually been rising over the years with the help of accumulated winter sand making its way to the corner. The buildup has created a larger issue: stepping into the woods on the other side of that fence, you will see that decades' worth of sand and debris is only held back by the original playground's chain link fence. There are three to four feet of sand buildup, and I am surprised that a good rainstorm has yet to wash that portion of the playground down into the lower field before now. The area has been fenced off with a new section of fencing to keep kids away from the area, but the plan is to have all that area excavated and the chain link fence replaced with a block retaining wall and proper drainage. The project will go out to bid in the spring, and the cost is currently being estimated for bidding purposes.

The fence along the back side of the playground at PCS has been down for a while after it suffered significant damage when a tree and branches came down in a windstorm late last spring. Finding a contractor to replace the fencing has been a considerable challenge. That work has since started and should be completed soon. We are replacing the existing fencing, including a swing gate at the top of the stairs to the lower athletic field.

In the past year, we have had four incidents of suspended propane leaks. In three of the four incidents that required fire department response, the fire departments found no evidence of any gas leak. These calls were at ESS and PCS. Since the Farmington explosion, folks have had a heightened sense of nervousness regarding propane, and with good reason. We have taken additional steps since each of these to ensure that our schools are safe, including having the tanks inspected, the feed lines inspected, and additional propane detectors installed. The safety committee has discussed our hazardous gas leak emergency response, which is being reviewed for any necessary modification. Both school principals have been actively involved with reaction and response.

We have been unhappy with our security vendor for some time. We have found that the preventative maintenance contracts with the provider have resulted in the school district paying for services promised by the agreement but have yet to receive. The vendor has a high employee turnover rate, which results in unfamiliarity with our system when they arrive on a property for service, and they frequently have to return after assuring us they have fixed a problem. Linda Chaisson has reached out to other school districts, and those that share our vendor are equally unimpressed, and others have chosen to go elsewhere. Going elsewhere will not be inexpensive because the cameras and door lock system are proprietary to this vendor. However, considering an alternative is in the district's best interest because we need a reliable system. The overall cost of the system replacement is being estimated and will be proposed in the CIP budget.

Due to a relatively recent change in State law that now approves school districts establishing reserve accounts for big-ticket items, we will be taking full advantage of that option. Municipalities have had this ability for decades, allowing them to put allocated funds into a future expense account to replace items such as fire trucks or road projects. School departments were not permitted to do so, but we will be taking full advantage of that law change, and you will see reserve lines proposed in next year’s budget. Items that will likely be suggested, but not limited to, for reserve accounts will be paving, roofs, athletic facilities (track), HVAC, and equipment.

**TRANSPORTATION**

We currently have one full-time bus driver position open. Stewart has been spending a lot of time driving to fill in gaps.

We took delivery of the new-to-us van and a new bus that has been on backorder.

We have four buses no longer in service, so I would like the Committee to recommend to the Board to authorize the sale of the vehicles. They are 2011, 2012, 2015, and 2016, and each is in a condition that will not take a sticker, and we believe they are not worth investing any further maintenance expense into. Their mileages are 138,324, 179,428, 97,596, and 104,612 respectively.

We will be looking to add a 12-passenger van to help avoid using a ride-share service and to be able to respond to unanticipated trips. Stewart and I have also been discussing how to deal with driver shortages in the future. One option for consideration is to purchase a couple of 84-passenger buses. We haven’t had 84-passenger buses since we were transporting high school students to Westbrook and Gray-New Gloucester before the high school was built. This would help us combine more concentrated routes with fewer drivers while avoiding adding time to the time students are on buses. We will be looking into the pricing difference for the larger buses*.*