March 30, 2009 steering committee meeting minutes

Time: 7 PM

Location: Eastside community center 6156 Douglas Ave., Racine, WI 53402

Attending: Pagette F, Brian, D. Jerry O, Kathy B, Theresa R, along with local leaders: Ron Coutts, Rep R Vos, Kevin Wanggaard, RUSD members: Dennis Wiser and Julie McKenna, candidates for RUSD board: John Leiber, Stella Young, and numberous concerned citizens of the community.

Pick of discussion: it’s not why, but why not?

Format: open informative discussion among attendees with opportunity to ask questions and inform RUSD board members as to our community objectives and concerns.

**Introductions**

Brian Dey provided an overview of our CSD mission: beginning with WISTAX Report, incremental tax increases (see CSDSC fact sheet), July 1 deadline for presentation of signatures, need for commercial development (can’t build a workforce without a good local school, Caledonia is not getting what it needs from RUSD in order to help us grow and prosper as a community, Caledonia funds 4% of RUSD’s tax base yet there’s a vast disparity of what we’re getting in return, Caledonia’s request for local control of the school board, buildings within the village of Caledonia under the asset and liability split would become CSD’s if we succeed; $44 million would be owed to us (per DPI’s decision), overall goal of the sea is the initiative: building a stronger sense of community.

Advantages to RUSD if Caledonia secedes: less students under RUSD’s responsibility (high school and middle school), disparity of student body size versus building size would decrease, would aid in resolving the redistricting issue which has bloomed for 10+ years-this goal becomes more possible if Caledonia leaves, shorten the bus rides for all students and intern wouldn’t need to change start times.

Audience comments/concerns/questions:

(\*”CCC” denotes commentary provided by a concerned Caledonia citizen from the audience)

* Ron explained that corporate development is a major shortcoming for Caledonia because employees don't want their students to attend RUSD as such many businesses that would have otherwise like to reside in Caledonia have since decided not to because of RUSD.
* \*CCC stated that many local students aren’t in are you SD, it could be, but instead attend private school (more than 700 Caledonia students are anticipated to attend private school), CCC for the concern that there has been much confirmed difficulty in with bringing in good families to Caledonia’s community because of RUSD, not only is this affecting Caledonia’s real estate but it also affects our property values.
* CCC stated that the quality of education can’t possibly get any worse and that’s we have nothing to lose by starting our own district; CCC further noted that currently RUSD students can’t do homework at home because available books are in short supply.
  + Brian commented that there is actually a surplus of books sitting in a warehouse but because RUSD is such a huge district they don’t even realize that some schools are short on supplies and vest the surplus it’s in a warehouse unused. Meanwhile the students are suffering from an inability to study at home. In short the district is too large and vastly mismanaged – A CSD would help remedy these issues
* CCC posed the question as to what the next steps are if we prevail with the split.
  + Brian responded, stating that if it is granted it will take 2 to 3 years to get our district up and running, likely three years because we will need to build a new high school.
* CCC inquired as to where the signatures need to come from
  + RUSD Boardmember Julie McKenna confirmed that anyone within the district ever seen me sign the petition. Julie further noted that the original unification process was split in terms of Caledonia support and that it was done in a way to save money at that time. She further added that if the board denies the split, we will still have the right to appeal. Julie stated that the board has no clue as to how many Caledonia citizens support a CUSD and that they won’t discuss it short of the 9,700 signatures being collected.
* CCC commented that the test scores of RUSD students are unacceptably low and that there appears to be (at least not from what she and her children have experienced) no push from RUSD teachers/administrators/board for students to prevail beyond their long-standing subpar scores.
  + RUSD Board member Julie McKenna disagreed stating her perspective ratings are fine as is because they’re at least not the worst scores in the nation. Further she commented that it breaks her heart to hear that parents are not happy with the performance of RUSD and that they intern want to have their own school district. She further added that this news is shocking to her as the board has not received any letters emails or phone calls from parents and/or concerns taxpayers stating anything of the sort.
* CCC stated that test scores should be better, much better, and that smaller class sizes would benefit all RUSD students.
* CCC commented that the root of the RUSD issues is that the schools are overcrowded, and in turn teachers have an unmanageable expanse of diverse needs within their classrooms.
* CCC commented that 37 years ago she moved to Caledonia under the promise (from her real estate agent) of receiving shorter bus routes for students, a better educational system, and local community functions such as a local library-37 years later, because of RUSD’s control, these needs were never met.
* CCC expressed the need for a good school system in order to achieve corporate expansion.
  + Brian noted that we can't change the reputation of the district overnight and provided a comparison of Caledonia to Oak Creek, Union Grove, Franklin, Burlington-both in community size, numerous growth objectives (including corporate expansion along the I – 94 Corridor) and ability to maintain their own school districts.
  + Brian provided additional overview on how the split would likely benefit both CSD and RUSD: smaller class sizes; more manageable districts; opportunity to partner with RUSD moving forward on various advanced educational and special needs programs (A savings to both districts); competition between the two districts would naturally lead RUSD to step up their education programming and overall organization. Lastly, Brian confirmed that the RUSD super intendant is willing to consider the split.
* CCC asked whether there’s a possibility of posting a nonbinding referendum in the April 7, 2009 ballot to display our support for a CSD to RUSD
  + Rep. Vos confirmed that the approach of placing a nonbinding referendum on the ballot could have done this year; however it’s too late now. Nonetheless if needed, the approach could be utilized next year though.
* CCC asked whether we can collect petition signatures at local schools
  + Brian confirmed that the CSDSC is currently considered a lobbyist group and that’s technically not a political movement per se. That aside, Jerry was asked to leave the premises while casually collecting petition signatures at the Gifford carnival event. In short, while it may be legal to do so, it’s not recommended. THE CSDSC does not wish for the petition signature collection two in anyway disrupt school functions or cause any friction with school administrators. This initiative is meant to be positive for all.
* CCC reflected on the various parental concerns with RUSD teachers, long bussing routes, manipulative diverse it T objectives (busing children out of the city into rural areas for no reason other than to create a mixture of student body and intern acquire more funding from the state, which serves as a detriment to the children who are as a result uprooted from their local community/friends), and need for better principles in many of the schools.
  + Brian responded that the issue of political dispute exists among the localities because when one needs – another once; further, each community has their own issues based on their unique make up an overall community needs and the reality is that RUSD is unable to meet all those community needs; while the concept of RUSD made sense years ago (when formed) because, at the time, they offered more than Caledonia could offer; however those times have long since changed-every community that RUSD serves has changed, it’s just not possible for RUSD to handle all of the unique needs and objectives of the respective communities that it attempts to serve.

Additional comments from RUSD Board Member:

* J. McKenna, confirmed the process of the split and RUSD’s ability to petition for the split on their own if they would so choose. If I split is accepted by the board then it will go to referendum or RUSD could resolve without a referendum; if denied by RUSD then the matter goes to the state board. She also stated that the board has not yet discussed a split and in turn has not voted on it, primarily because they feel unaware of whether the community of Caledonia supports the initiative and generally assume that there is an support for a CST. They’re awaiting 9700 signatures as evidence of support. Further, Julie stated that she and other board members have never received any contact from any parents as to their concerns with the poor schooling of RUSD and/or illustrating their support of a CSD. She also commented that several RUSD Schools do have a good test scores and good teachers and thus, she felt it was unfair for parents to feel that RUSD as a whole needs improvement.

With regard to the listen and linkage session scheduled for March 31, 2009, Julie noted that if more than 50 sign up then RUSD Will schedule another L&L session. She alleged that because of the limitation in space at Gifford they’re splitting people up into three separate groups and will be asked predetermined questions. Primarily, what’s going right with RUSD, what’s going wrong with RUSD, and what should be improved with RUSD.

Brian noted that the L&L session is not quite what Caledonia needs in terms of expressing their support for a CSD as well as stating their concerns about RUSD. Notably the chair of L&L is the same person who publicly announced that RUSD wouldn’t give any attention to that CSD initiative.

Additional comments from representative Robin Vos:

* Rep Vos: confirmed his support of the CSD initiative and encourage folks to help move the initiative forward. Further, he stated that when going door-to-door for his own campaign, he inquired to the Caledonia community regarding the CSD initiative and found that nearly everyone supports the idea. Overall, he found that the concern is not necessarily about the teachers but rather the community and poor schooling overall. While speaking with community members, Rep. Vos receive comments such as, “my kids were lucky” (meaning, they had good parents and good guidance and where that’s fortunately able to make it through the RUSD System successfully). Rep. Vos stated that it shouldn’t depend on the fortune of kids to survive a school system, but rather, the success of a child should depend on the merits of the school system (as well as parenting and the child). All things considered, Rep. Vos feels that it boils down to whether Caledonia wants to be part of RUSD – an oversized school district of 20,000 kids-a district that is not going to be as accountable to each individual community as what a smaller district. Lastly, he compared RUSD to Burlington and confirmed that small districts can do great things. Burlington being a good example of such success, as well as Oakcreek, Franklin, and Union Grove.

General status updates and advisements:

* Brian inform the audience that the yard signs are being ordered as well as buttons and possibly T-shirts.
* Jerry O. advised of the audience to vote for John Leiber and Stella young to help change the lack of Caledonia representation on the RUSD board. (note: Stella Young is a Mount Pleasant resident, but has shown interest in the CSD initiative.)
* Note: we need volunteers to collect signatures at various polling locations (outside the building only)
* Jerry O. outlined the proper method for collecting signatures, including confirming whether the sign he has previously signed the petition.
* Brian and Jerry encouraged the audience to join the rally on Tuesday, March 31, 2009 at Gifford starting at 5 PM, prior to the L&L session with RUSD.
* The next CSDSC meeting will be held April 13 at 7:00 PM (Note: there’s a finance meeting that night but they do plan to be completed by 7:00pm)

Task:

Brian will post to WWW.Caledoniaschooldist.org a listing of local businesses were volunteers may position themselves to collect petition signatures from customers.