

**VILLAGE OF GROSSE POINTE SHORES, A MICHIGAN CITY**  
**MINUTES OF THE AMBASSADOR COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING**  
**April 18, 2012**

A special meeting of the Ambassador Committee of the Village of Grosse Pointe Shores, A Michigan City, was held on Wednesday, April 18, 2012 in the Council Chambers of the Grosse Pointe Shores Municipal Building. The meeting was called to order at 10 AM.

Present:

Ambassador Committee Members

- DJ Boehm, Chair
- Gloria Anton, Member
- Alex Lucido, Member
- Madeleine Phillips, Member
- Chace Wakefield, Member
- Kay Felt, Council Liaison

Grosse Pointe School System Representatives

- Dr. Tomas Harwood, Superintendent of Schools
- Dr. Cathryn Armstrong, Principal at Parcels Middle School
- Mr. Tim Bearden, Principal at North High School

City Administration Representatives

- Mr. Mark Wollenweber, Grosse Pointe Shores Interim City Manager
- Chief John Schulte, Grosse Pointe Shores Public Safety Director

Absent: None

Also Present: Several members of the audience

Additional document: Discussions from this meeting were also published in the April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012 *Grosse Pointe News*, many of which are excerpted in these minutes.

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

DJ Boehm stated that the purpose of the Ambassador Committee is to encourage people to purchase real estate in Grosse Pointe Shores. Recently, the committee conducted interviews with residents and found that the schools were cited as both a strength and an area of concern. One goal of the meeting is to discuss those concerns with the school officials. The concerns fell into two areas, safety and residency issues. A second goal of the meeting is to hear from the schools their perspectives on why potential new residents should consider Grosse Pointe.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

## **I. Resident Concerns**

### **A. Residency**

“Residency is really dictated by some of the pupil accounting rules we comply with,” said superintendent Tom Harwood. In its Pupil Accounting Manual, the Michigan Department of Education considers a student a "resident pupil" if it meets one of the following criteria:

- The pupil's parents or legal guardian reside in the district, regardless of divorce and custody issues
- The pupil lives with a relative (parent, grandparent, brother, sister, stepparent, step-grandparent, stepsister, stepbrother, uncle, aunt, first cousin, great aunt or great uncle by marriage, blood or adoption) other than a parent for the purposes of securing a suitable home
- The pupil resides in a licensed home, as placed by court order or a child placing agency
- There is an F-1 Visa
- The student is a foreign exchange student living with a host family
- The pupil is homeless per the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
- Having been incarcerated in a county jail, the pupil becomes a resident of the district and may enroll in district schools, and,
- If from a military family and living with a non-custodial parent or loco parentis, the pupil may enroll in the non-custodial parent's district one month prior to the tour of active duty and six months after its completion.

School administration verifies residency upon enrollment through required documentation, such as lease agreements, property deed ownership, utility bills and other such documents. For non-residents to enroll, according to the district's residency bylaw, 5111, they must pay a per-diem tuition rate based on funding obtained from the "hold harmless" millage, and those found enrolled illegally may pay a higher tuition rate, as established by the board.

As of Feb. 9, the district has performed 124 investigations, leading to 28 exclusions. The number of investigations is comparable with recent years, though in 2009-2010, the district investigated 351 students. In terms of exclusions, this year is the lowest since 2005-2006, when the school excluded 26. "To a certain degree, it's (residency) overblown," Bearden said about public perception. "We've had some changes in our communities. We have a more transient population now, in that we have more rentals. We see people coming and going, which makes it difficult to keep track of all those changes.

"Most of the time, though, the school is able to prove residency."

The schools represent the best interests of the Grosse Pointe community and Harper Woods. Grosse Pointe North is in the top five percent, and Parcels is a top school. Emotional and physical safety are paramount per school officials. Residency is dictated by public pupil accounting.

Calls come in occasionally with questions about residency. The Accounting manual allows

youngsters to attend even though they are not full-time residents. If a family moves, a student is allowed to finish their senior year. One individual, a school system employee, does check residency issues daily. Certified letters are sometimes sent out to see if they are deliverable. Proof must be provided by several documents. If several students have the same address—legal guardianship must be provided. Homeless students may attend any Michigan school. Tuition payment is assessed if necessary.

Questions from the audience:

- Is the state required to return funding? The answer is no.
- How many times does the person go out to check residency? There are two to three residency checks every week because of rentals—sometimes month to month rentals.
- A Grosse Pointe library employee indicated that there are residency issues at the library. Students come in to check out books and have no library card with no idea what street they live on.
- The use of fake documents was brought up.

Mr. Bearden stated that the concerns are overblown due to the transient population. There may be 10-12 concerns per year. Students sometimes will reveal to school authorities students who are in violation.

## **B. Safety**

More so than residency, the committee heard concerns about student and administrator safety. "I can't walk into the school and look at a student and tell whether they're a resident or not, but I can tell when somebody is being unruly and I think that's the No. 1 problem," Shores councilman Dan Schulte said. "I've gone to see a counselor and had people that would stand in my way, and I had to tell them to move before they'd get out of my way. The threshold of tolerance for bad behavior, across the board, has become too lax. That's the biggest problem we have is lack of discipline here."

Schulte and other residents, Realtors and councilmen in attendance raised issues about hallway overcrowding and unruliness between classes, unnecessary violence during and after school and other such perceptions.

"We are hearing an exceptional amount at Parcels, and I'm not going to make this a north and south issue, because it's happening everywhere, that there are so many fights going on," Alex Lucido said. "I don't know if it's perception or reality, but I'm talking to parents everyday because I sell real estate in this community, and I keep hearing about the fights. What are the consequences?"

Per school officials, state law requires mandatory reporting of 16 distinct incidences in terms of bullying and violence. With regard to district policy, a first-time offense is a five-day suspension, second offense a 10-day suspension and third offense likely results in expulsion. In most cases, as incidents occur, administration consults their police liaison, as well as legal counsel regarding disciplinary action.

"Beyond the 16 mandatory reportables, if we believe somebody is being disorderly in our

building, we do involve the police," Armstrong said. "That's not a mandatory reportable, but we report it anyway because we don't tolerate disorderly conduct or behavior by anyone in our buildings at any time."

Added Bearden: "We report every incident that we're required to report by law to the Grosse Pointe Woods police. There are very few incidents we're required to report by law. Assault is required. We do keep statistics on incidents going on in our schools."

Pending legal counsel, at its May regular meeting, the Grosse Pointe Public School System Board of Education will vote on modifications to its administrative policy, "5600 — Student Discipline," requiring administration to prepare quarterly a more expansive disciplinary report, enabling the community and board to have a better understanding of the district's disciplinary actions and its execution of policies and guidelines.

Someone from the audience stated that there is a threshold of tolerance for misbehavior because it impacts all students. Mr. Bearden strongly disagreed. He stated that we have an exceptional school. Response is immediate to anyone who exhibits poor behavior.

Gloria Anton brought up an incident regarding Mr. Abud. Per Tim Beardon, Mr. Abud was not put into the hospital because of an attack by a student. He sprained his finger by leaning into a wall.

Alex Lucido talks with parents and hears about fights—girls and boys. .

Advanced placement offers an aura of safety. Mr. Bearden said this is not true.

Reality versus perception—rumors are spreading about gangs. A communication campaign should be enacted.. Mr. Bearden said that the rumors are based on fear. He invited everyone to visit the school to see.

Someone in the audience stated that students are in fear of going down certain halls and that teachers are intimidated that there is a a different set of rules at North and that the dress code not enforced. Dr. Armstrong stated that she has never had a report that a teacher was intimidated by a student.

Fights are a criminal matter. The schools document these allegations with a police report. Incidents are reported to police and statistics are kept. Dr, Armstrong cited the 16 mandatory reportable items. The schools don't tolerate misbehavior. They are proactive and preventive.

Alex Lucido stated that even if there is a[policeman in the building, kids now don't care. It was stated that Detective Kerber is there.

A woman in the audience stated that rumors she hears come from people who don't have students in the public schools. A Parcels parent stated that her son was "punched in the privates" at the beginning of the school year. She never received a phone call from the school. It was stated that the "N" word is thrown around like it's "dude." Dr, Armstrong stated that the protocol

is reported, addressed, communicated. They have a P-3 program addressing specific issues with students. Bodily contact is prohibited.

Kay Felt: asked how do students know what expectations are? Dr, Armstrong responded that they have the 20-minute P-3 program weekly. At North, they have video announcements and club announcements. The Parent Club meets twice monthly at North, there is an “Options Room” for “ownership of behavior.

"The interesting thing is, the only place I ever have to defend Grosse Pointe North High School is in Grosse Pointe," Bearden said. "When we go elsewhere, the perception is that we are an exemplary school. Because we are. And I would tell you those perceptions are based on fears and mythical things that aren't true. If I didn't think it was safe, I wouldn't work here. If I didn't think our system was safe, I wouldn't have moved my kids into our school district.

"I can't change the perception. We constantly promote the positive things we do. I can't change what people talk about, other than come to our schools and see for yourself and I think you'll be impressed."

## **II. What Should Potential New Residents Know About Grosse Pointe Public Schools?**

Mr. Bearden created a list of talking points for home-buying clients, which he distributed to the group. He pointed out that there is often “Tower Fever” because people want to send their children to South. He emphatically stated that we have *two* exceptional high schools in this community. We want to keep the “sparkling gem” image. He encouraged people to do research.

Dr. Harwood offered to continue the partnership with the committee. Dr. Harwood brought literature regarding the schools to share with the audience. The left over literatures from the meeting was taking to the City Offices, post meeting for additional distribution.

Dr. Armstrong noted Parcels is a fantastic school, and the community is well served by it. The tipping point is to hear more wonderful things than negatives. Collaboration is positive. Mr. Bearden reiterated comments. We embrace the diversity in our community and appreciate the dialogue.

### ADJOURN

Kay Felt thanked Dr. Harwood for being responsive to the Ambassador Committee’s request for a special meeting.

The meeting was adjourned by DJ Boehm.

Respectfully submitted,

Madeleine Phillips  
Member

