

## **Waterville-Elysian-Morristown Minutes Special Meeting**

Thursday, November 13, 2025

The WEM Board of Education met in a special session on November 13, 2025. Board Chairman Gary Micheal called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm.

Board members: Michael, June Rezac, Jon Bakken, Brenda Heuss, Jeff Stangler, Troy Tolzman (arrived 6:35 pm), and student board member Grace Bartz attended the meeting. Members Jay Schneider and Student Board Member Jocelyn Brown were absent. Also, in attendance was Superintendent Mark Winter.

Motion by Stangler and seconded by Michael to approve the meeting agenda. Motion passed.

### **Dr. Jeff Horton, Southwest Metro School District 288**

Southwest Metro is a large geographical intermediate school, with an 11-member board. Each district member has a board member who sits on the Southwest Metro board. WEM, JWP, Waseca, and NRHEG are four of the associate members with Southwest Metro.

Southwest Metro is looking for space. Waseca district currently houses one of Southwest Metro's facilities. Waseca wishes to expand its offerings, and consequently, Southwest Metro is looking for a different facility. Southwest Metro conducted an independent facility study and financial analysis to determine the pros and cons of utilizing the Morristown facility. If WEM and Southwest Metro were to move forward, construction would be done in the Morristown facility. If sold, due to the bond currently in place, dollars from the sale would most likely have to go through the defeasance process, delaying access to the funds possibly upwards of a decade. WEM district taxpayers would still need to pay off the bonds. Horton expressed that there would be a possibility of a differential with Southwest Metro expenses to alleviate the tax burden until the bond is paid. That difference would be adjusted depending upon how many associate districts participated as partners in the facility.

Stangler asked for information on the security and safety of students attending, or any challenges that would occur that would impact the community. With the use of the Morristown facility, a sprinkler system would be installed, allowing for a locked facility. This would help prevent the eloping of students. Horton drew a basic schematic of how the facility would be divided into zones: elementary programming, autism, and transitions. The gymnasium and current kitchen/cafeteria would also be zoned so it could be used for WEM athletics and community use.

Stangler asked what the scope of the school day was. Currently, 167 student days, 187 staff days. 7:15 am-3:15 pm staff day, 8:05 am-2:30 pm for students.

Stangler asked about community concerns with police presence at the current facility. Horton responded that different groups shared the current facility and did not have data that all calls were due to Southwest Metro. Horton would try to provide the data, but also wanted to communicate that these are students, not violent offenders. Take a high school, the number of calls to their facility would not be that different. Teacher-to-student ratio is two teachers, one para to 4-8 students, as well as social workers and health professionals.

Bakken asked if leased vs. selling would prevent the ability to lock down the facility. Horton responded that the fire code prevents locking down without the fire suppression system. Michael asked if leased vs. selling would mean all costs for updating the facility would fall to the WEM district. Horton confirmed that if leasing the building, yes, all facility upgrade costs would fall to WEM. Southwest Metro purchasing the building, 99% of facility upgrades would have a tax impact on the associate districts involved, with 1% of the costs falling to the other 11 member districts.

Michael asked how this would benefit our students and also how students would be involved within the community. Horton advised working within the University of Minnesota for their Transitions program. Southwest Metro would create partnerships in the community for Transitions students. Using the academy's model, Southwest Metro encourages students to be trained locally, live locally, work locally, and spend locally. The current band room and art rooms could be repurposed for some CTE courses.

Bakken asked if this had been shared with the other districts' school boards and what the timeline would be if we were to move forward. Horton responded of four districts (WEM, JWP, NRHEG, and Waseca), two are still exploring what other options are available. Member districts will be meeting with Horton to discuss, and would need to have indications from the WEM board by Dec/Jan that we wish to move forward. Impact on the district if not moving forward would be continuing building costs for Morritown facility, possibility of students going to Metro if space allows, and/or a Southwest Metro going to/building a different facility, which could be a larger facility cost, and would still impact the WEM district and students. A major factor is wait lists. Most programs have extensive waitlists, which causes other options to be limited or not cost-effective. If area districts are not members, the costs for their students would be 20% higher to send their students to the facility. There is also the possibility of closing enrollment to only member districts to ensure there is room for member students.

#### **Discuss Lot for Sale 5th Street S. and Common St. E.**

Winter inquired if the board wishes to move further with pursuing the purchase or dropping it. Stangler advised it would need to be cleared so many inches down, then new fill would be brought in if still contaminated. Winter advised three spills, one substantial, all have been cleared. Stangler

advised that there would possibly be grants for clean-up. The lot under discussion would be the middle lot only, not the corner. Winter will report back with the exact square footage and soil sample costs, and verify with side lots if interested in the sale. Bakken advised that there is the possibility of utilizing the Catholic church's upper lot for parking. Details for the lot use at this time are unknown.

**First Reading of Policies:**

515 Protection and Privacy of Pupil Records

520 Student Surveys

520 FORM-Student Surveys

521 Student Disability Non-Discrimination

531 The Pledge of Allegiance

Reviewed upcoming meeting dates:

Confirmed January 8, 2026, is an Organizational Meeting at 6:30 pm

Motion by Bakken, seconded by Stangler, to adjourn. Motion passed at 7:41 pm.

Attest:

June A. Rezac, Vice Chair

Gary Michael, Board Chair