

March 14, 2024

Tom Hinkeldey, Chairman
Board of Directors
Alta-Aurelia Community School District

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Dear Mr. Hinkeldey;

We believe a possible crime of Criminal Mischief §716, possibly up to the degree of a Class “C” felony, depending on the dollar amount of damage, may have occurred at the Alta-Aurelia Community School District (AACS) building located at 101 W 5th Street, Alta. As you know, this is the Alta Central Office Building or Old High School Building.

We think this is serious enough that your first response should be to contact the Buena Vista County Sheriff, Kory Elston, and file a complaint asking him to investigate prior to notifying any other parties. As this is not a civil complaint, we don't see the need to initially contact the school district's attorney. As possible suspects could include Superintendent Olhausen himself, we urge you to meet with Sheriff Elston and/or the County Attorney and follow any of their instructions in response to your criminal complaint, if you choose to file it.

We also have a report from a credible source that water faucets to a sink in the Home Ec room were turned on two different nights in November/December 2023, and left to run overnight in the locked room. When discovered, they had to be turned off and the water damage cleaned up both times. That credible source will be disclosed to an investigative officer from the Sheriff's Office per their request.

The other information gathered was obtained through a series of Public Records requests we have commissioned. These records have all been provided to us either by the Custodian of Public Records at AACS (Olhausen) or the Custodian of Public records at the Buena Vista County Sheriff's office (Elston).

Initially, Public Records custodian Olhausen showed real reluctance to provide these and other public records, by quoting us over \$2,000 to secure this record which was included with the larger packet of records. Later, with some minor amendments to our request, he reduced it to a little over \$200, per our persistent appeals. At one point we warned him we'd be reporting him to the Iowa Public Records Board if he would continue to hold out providing us a boiler inspection report, well past the timeline established by Iowa law.

The boiler inspection report, dated July 31st of 2023, shows that repairs needed to be made to the boiler. The inspection revealed that the boiler had “several tube end leaks that are leaking at both sheets” and to pass inspection, service was required to “Repair/replace the affected tubes as soon as possible...”

Rasmussen Mechanical Services of Sioux City, Iowa provided a quote (#Q2400140) to AACS dated January 9, 2024, of \$35,987 to replace the boiler's affected tubes, which requires the boiler to be shut down completely. Again, AACS was made aware of this need back on July 31st, per their Inspection Report of the same date.

In their printed quote Rasmussen provided clarifications required for them to accomplish this major task. One clarification was that the work would be conducted during 10-hour shifts, Monday through Friday. Another clarification Rasmussen made was that “Work is estimated to take 8 to 10 working days to complete.” Counting weekends this is approximately two weeks that the boiler providing heat to the building would be off.

From what we understand, the boiler was shut down on January 7, 2024. In an attached email Olhausen sent to Nicole Howard of Rasmussen on January 12, 2024, it was debated how safe it was for their employees to come to the site and work. Olhausen did say, though, that “conditions are bad here.”

I (Sara Lietz) made a notable error in paragraph 3. It should read "We also have a report from a credible source that the Home Ec room sink on 3rd floor was left to run overnight in the locked room some time in December. When discovered, it had to be turned off and the water cleaned up... (So I wrote that it happened twice in the letter, then later found out it was once. This was simply a communication error on our part- two credible sources verified this information.) Thanks for reading! 4//29/2024

Another notable error was found -- the boiler did not pass inspection initially, but after repairs in the fall of '23, the boiler was able to receive a Certificate of Operation. It was easy to make this mistake, since the Boiler Inspection Report given to us by Olhausen showed that it did not pass inspection (had not yet been amended after work was done). Questions still remain as to why no supplemental heat provided when boiler was off, why choose winter to work on the boiler, etc. Thanks for reading! 5/18/24

Consider that the Farmers' Almanac database [here](#) reports that the low temperature on January 17, 2024, was -0.4 F, the high was 15.8F and maximum sustained wind speed that day was 24.17 mph. Why schedule non-emergency boiler repairs that require the boiler to be off for several days in January when it is so bitterly cold? Why risk water pipes freezing and breaking, as well as possible other damage to this building, when the repair is not urgent?

4 Seasons Plumbing Heating Cooling of Alta reported in their attached/enclosed details of service on Invoice #4079, on that same date January 17, 2024, "Received a call of another bad water leak. Shut off water to building and shut down boiler. Found that someone had opened up two valves on the third floor and the lines thawed out and the water started to come out of the open valves all over the 3rd floor and worked its way down to the administrative offices. Shut off valves and turned water back on and started boiler back up." We have no reason to believe this report provided to us by Denny Olhausen is inaccurate.

To summarize, AACS administrators knew for at least 160 days (July 31st to January 7th) that the boiler in the Alta Central Office Building needed a major repair. Yet they waited until one of the coldest weeks of the winter of 2023-24 to shut down the boiler, knowing it would need to be off for nearly two weeks. A few days later someone gains access to the third floor and turns on two water valves.

It appears someone had set about a pattern of criminal mischief to do water damage to the Alta Central Office Building. So we commissioned a request be made of the Buena Vista County Sheriff's Office of their log of calls and alarms coming into their Comm. Center from December 1, 2023 thru January 31, 2024. It is enclosed/attached as well.

Sheriff Elston advised that one of these calls to the Comm. Center had to do with a garnishment served at the school office, and the others had to do with school building alarm issues which were resolved when the alarm company later came in. There was not one call in that 62-day period for a report of vandalism nor criminal mischief. One incident report (Call #24002707) of the call to the Comm. Center is dated January 18, 2024, the day after the open water lines were discovered. The report found that the issue of the alarms that day is that these alarms go off "because the ceilings are collapsing" and "fire things are falling down with it." Clearly there was significant damage to the building.

We believe a sheriff's investigation may uncover some answers to our questions: Why did Mr. Olhausen not call the Sheriff when the water was left on in a locked room, resulting in water damage back in November/December? Why did Superintendent Olhausen schedule boiler repairs in January vs. finishing repairs months earlier or waiting until it was warmer and therefore safer to do so? Even if there was a good reason to shut down the boiler in January, why did he not make arrangements for an alternative heat source during that time? Why did Superintendent Olhausen not call the Sheriff's Office after receiving the 4 Seasons invoice saying that someone had opened the water valves, resulting in more water damage?

We think these questions have a greater relevance knowing that members of the school board have been meeting with Piper | Sandler, a bond dealer and are considering funding proposals for new school buildings. One proposal provided to the board projects \$43,757,500 in future property taxes to homeowners, businesses and landowners. The Sheriff could investigate to answer the question: Did anyone whom the school board employs at AACS want to have serious water damage at the Alta Central Office Building to create a perceived need for new buildings? In other words, was this intentional criminal conduct?

We petition you to call Sheriff Elston and ask him to assign an officer to investigate these matters. Please let us know your decision by end of business, Tuesday, March 19, 2024.

Thank you, Tom.

Sincerely,

Alta-Aurelia Citizens For Progress
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