

Summary (TL:DR)

- I support public education and the Shaker Schools but that does not mean that I support the wrong plan with the wrong leadership.
- We need a **Long-Term Facilities Planning Committee** before beginning a building plan.
- We must ensure **Pre-K for All Students** now and address other **Equity Failures** in the district.
- We must **Manage School Finances** in a sustainable manner with educational excellence as the priority.
- We must have **Better Leadership** around facilities and other district operations.
- **Shaker Deserves Better** – when a better plan is developed, I will be at the front of the line to support it, to contribute to the campaign and to work to pass it.

Since the summer of 2022, Doug Wang and I have met with elected officials, former officials, school administrators, teachers and many, many concerned citizens. In November 2022 we began sending emails to a growing list of people expressing our understanding of what the community wants and will support. Neither the superintendent nor the school board have ever been receptive, with the superintendent telling us directly that we “were impeding the process”. Earlier this summer Doug decided to run for the school board to attempt to change practices and direction from the inside. I strongly encourage you to support him – <https://www.dougwang4shakerschools.com>

The Shaker School Board voted recently to place a bond issue and 2 tax levies on the November ballot. This includes: 6.45 mills for the first segment of a \$302.9 million building plan; a required 0.5 mills for maintenance; and a 3.0 mill levy for operating expenses - a total 9.95 mills. The cost to homeowners will be \$348/per \$100K of property valuation ($\$35/\text{mill} \times 9.95 = \348.25). The board structured the issue so that there is only 1 vote for the combined issue - voters are not able to vote on the parts individually.

I believe in public education and the Shaker Schools, I have children who are Shaker graduates and grandchildren currently in the schools, I have donated to levy campaigns and spent hundreds of hours working to pass the last 3 operating levies. I will vote NO on the ballot issue. This is a hard decision for me, there is no question that the school facilities need renovation and modernization, and that high quality pre-K needs to be provided for all children, but this ballot issue, the process that got us here, and the current school leadership fail in so many ways that I believe the community would be in a better position with a reset of the district’s priorities, of district leadership and a rethink both of how to modernize facilities and how to interact with the community. A complete redo of district buildings which the community will have to live with for generations deserves both more time and better leadership.

The ballot issue does not deserve support for a number of overlapping reasons which encompass both facilities specific and leadership/accountability failures.

Long-Term Facilities Planning Committee

There has been no objective evaluation of the most cost-effective way to modernize the buildings and no plan made for maintenance. Unlike in some other districts, there has not been a facilities committee to evaluate the costs, priorities, or the most efficient and least disruptive

way to modernize facilities. In our earlier emails we said, “...we must do a better job in managing our very valuable infrastructure and a joint District/Board/Community Facilities Master Planning Committee is a good way to start.” “Taking time to engage the community to develop a credible long-term plan for facilities modernization that not only has a strategy for ongoing maintenance but also explains how these capital investments will improve student achievement and narrow the achievement gap will take time but is necessary to build community understanding and support.” **This has not happened.**

There have been many false alarms about the need to act now for fear of losing the state cost share. Fear mongering is not a sign of an objective process or reasoning. The artificial deadline and sense of urgency served to block adequate discussion, planning or public engagement. In 2016 the state cost share was 24%, in 2022 it was 36%, in 2023 it is now 37%. There has been no evaluation of what the true cost might be if building modernization was done without the OFCC requirements which are designed to push districts to build new buildings. The OFCC cost share program will exist next year, we can take the time to do this properly.

There are many concerns in the community that the district has not been able to address adequately – rather the approach seems to be “trust us – we will figure it out”. Among these concerns are: What is the educational justification? Why do we need to build a new HS? Why does all of Woodbury except the clock tower section need to be demolished? When will my child’s school be renovated? How will traffic around the new middle years building “at the Woodbury site” be managed? Why isn’t pre-K offered at the school my children will attend? What will happen to the 23-acre middle school site? How will the plan affect school sports especially in the middle years? Will construction disrupt field use by community youth sports? Will the vastly expanded parking lots required by the OFCC eliminate fields and green space? The OFCC offers specific site/size guidelines for athletic fields, but it appears little attention has been given to this in the current plan. Neither Fernway (less than 50% of the standard), nor a new middle years building “at the Woodbury site” meet the acreage recommended for the OFCC program.

“Trust us – we will figure it out” is not an adequate substitute for having a solid plan that addresses all the issues. The last major reconfiguration of the school district in the 1980s took more than 4 years of planning and included a broad-based community study group.

Pre-K for all Students - Universal Pre-K

Making high-quality pre-K available to all students is both a moral imperative and a practical empirical way to begin to address the opportunity/achievement gaps that exist unaddressed in our school system. In our earlier emails we outlined the need (55% of incoming K students without pre-K), the opportunity (excess space in buildings and \$65+ million surplus) and advocated for immediate action – “*If we are serious about addressing the achievement gap, we should expand our pre-K program now.*” **This has not happened.**

The district provides the legally mandated half-day of pre-K to students with identified special needs, with some additional “peer model” students. Both the district’s 2023-24 Early Childhood Information Session ([here](#)) and district reports to the ODE indicate 74 pre-K students. There have been reports to the board and the community which claim to have more students. Marketing for the ballot issue has claimed as many as 130 students this year.

Superintendent Glasner said in a board meeting last year that expanding pre-K was “just too expensive”. Soon after, Board President Jolly put out a statement that the district would

develop “...universal Pre-K for all 4 year olds.” Board President Jolly was featured in Shaker Life magazine promoting the transformative nature of pre-K. There were no statements of support, agreement, or commitment from either Superintendent Glasner or any other board members. Dr. Jolly has recently chosen not to run for a second term on the board.

There has not been a needs analysis done nor any attempt to determine what the barriers are to broader pre-K attendance. In marketing the ballot issue, the 3.0 mill levy for operating expenses (expected to raise \$2.8 million) is labeled as being “needed for pre-K” despite having a \$65.7 million surplus. There is also planning to renovate Ludlow school to become a new administration building and pre-K site in the future rather than simply putting pre-K in the K-4 buildings immediately. This adds an additional building and has been estimated to cost over \$15 million.

The years of resistance, the foot dragging, the open statement that it’s “too expensive”, the decision of the board member leading the push for pre-K to not seek re-election, the lack of leadership on the issue, the failure of the district to ever apply for any of the outside funding available for pre-K, the long history of incrementalism and the pretense around what the district is currently doing are clear reasons to question the current leadership’s commitment, intent and ability to make high quality pre-K available to all students.

Equity Failures

There is no plan and no discussion of re-evaluating elementary school attendance zones as part of the facilities plan. Students in the Moreland neighborhood have been bussed to Mercer since their neighborhood school was closed in 1987. These students are bussed to the school farthest from their homes, despite 4 other closer schools, simply because they are Black. Black students make up close to 75% of bussed students. This is unacceptable and does not align with the district’s stated equity goal.

The building plan specifies building yet another addition to Fernway. The sole purpose of the addition is to maintain the status quo, race-based attendance zones across the district. If the attendance zones were adjusted, there would be adequate space in the other 4 elementary buildings to accommodate all K-5 students without building another addition on the whitest, most modern, and most landlocked school.

Management of School Finances

Any observer of the district’s finances knows the future will be challenging. In addition to the current ballot issue there will be a second bond issue for a new HS and several operating levies expected in the next few years. The 5-yr forecast projects a \$23 million annual budget deficit by 2027. This is in an environment in which student numbers decreased by 16% while employee numbers increased by 6%. Rather than addressing the need for cost and structural reform, the district has projected as many as 3 operating levies in the next 8 years with a 40% increase in school taxes. This is not sustainable in a district which already has the highest school tax in Ohio. There needs to be a re-evaluation of costs and benefits with educational excellence as the priority. The Finance & Audit Committee, comprised of financial and management experts from Shaker, has been underutilized for several years with incomplete data and inadequate time provided for analysis. Major decisions including voting to adopt the facilities plan, to add an additional operating levy to the ballot issue and the vote to place it on the ballot were all taken without formal review or support from the Finance & Audit Committee. As we said in a prior email – “*While the community is very supportive of the schools, the board needs to*

understand that any tax increases are justified by higher student achievement, district efficiency and long-term sustainability.”

Leadership Around Facilities

Community trust and perhaps respect for the board and the administration is at a low point. Much of this is self-induced. The current leadership both at the school board and the senior administration level does not inspire confidence that they would be capable of competently managing a complete redo of the district which the community will have to live with for generations – both with the physical buildings and with the 40 plus years of debt to pay for it.

The board abdicated its responsibility to represent the community and passively let the building plan unfold in 2022, driven by an out of touch superintendent (who sends his own children to private school) and a director of operations who spent his career building new schools in Berea. This approach produced the bizarrely out of touch plan to demolish all 8 of the school buildings and replace them with a single centralized elementary, a new middle and a new high school. After community outrage, the board president sent a letter promising not to close any elementary schools but still building both a new middle and a new high school while abandoning Woodbury, presumably for later demolition. Since then, the plan has morphed to include a middle years school “at the Woodbury site” with a small central part of the building reused to “appease the community” as one board member phrased it. Justification for each plan has been fluid, including cost savings associated with reducing excess capacity and decreasing the number of buildings, which is not achieved in the current plan.

Other Leadership Failures

None of these failures inspires confidence that this is the leadership team to manage a \$302.9 million plan that will shape both the Shaker Schools and the City for generations.

- The district failed to prepare or train teachers and failed to effectively communicate with the community before rolling out its vitally important de-tracking program. The result has been described as “leveling down” by teachers and as “a disaster” by the district’s Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer.
- The district has proven incapable of effectively and reliably bussing students. Students and families using school district buses have experienced missing and long delayed buses last year and again as this school year starts.
- In 2021 the board extended Superintendent Glasner’s contract for an additional 5 years apparently without doing a formal evaluation of his performance or having written goals and expectations.
- The board failed to hire a new treasurer despite being given a year lead time by retiring Treasurer Christman. The district now faces managing an annual operating budget of \$108 million as well as a proposed \$302.9 million facilities plan with an interim treasurer.
- The board routinely conducts non-public Executive Sessions without clearly specifying the reason – in violation of the Ohio Open Meetings Act ([here](#)).
- The district has not been a cooperative partner with the City: dropping out of the Forward Together process to pursue the current facilities plan, failing to attend joint meetings to coordinate and develop improved recreation citywide, resisting changes to a bus garage location needed to implement the Lee Road Action Plan.

- The presumptive incoming board president had a leadership role and was the single biggest funder (\$7200) of the “Fair Ticketing” Charter Amendment which was estimated to cost the City more than \$6 million a year.
- In an environment where leadership matters, of the 6 new building principals hired in the past 4 years, two are no longer principals while a third recently had a faculty vote of no confidence.
- The district continues to misrepresent the cost of the ballot issue as \$296/\$100K property valuation rather than the correct \$348/\$100K because there is an unrelated tax decrease coincidentally occurring next year. Honesty matters.

Shaker Deserves Better

- We need a Long-Term Facilities Master Planning Committee with broad based community involvement and expertise to determine the best, most efficient, and least disruptive plan before we begin
- We need real demonstrated expansion of pre-K now so that all children entering Kindergarten have a high-quality pre-K experience
- We need to address the long-term structural race-based inequities of our elementary school attendance zones and the resulting bussing
- We need to use the Finance & Audit committee to advise the district in developing a sustainable plan and budget to finance the operation of our schools in the future before committing to 37 years of debt service
- We need a board and administration that listens to the community and is both responsive and responsible

When there is such a plan developed, as I am certain there will be, I will be at the front of the line to support it, to contribute to the campaign and to work to pass it.

This will require work and will only happen if the message from the community is that the current culture and leadership are not acceptable. Voting NO on this ballot issue is the only voice citizens have that can't be ignored. If this ballot issue passes there will be no requirement to seek community approval for any aspect of the building plan until the next ballot issue for a new HS.

Thank you for reading this far. I would appreciate hearing your perspective on the ballot issue and on the various issues described above. Once again, I support public education and the Shaker Schools but that doesn't mean that I, nor you, should support the wrong plan with the wrong leadership.

Kurt