

October 30, 2023

In September, I wrote a long email outlining why I will be voting NO on the school ballot issue ([email text here](#)). Earlier this month I wrote an email with more reasons to vote NO ([email text here](#)). The summary from those emails was -

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

As I wrote in my previous emails and recapitulate above – **Shaker Deserves Better**. When there is a better 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 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 this building plan.

Responding to a few new questions from readers:

Given the fact that Doug Wang is supporting Issue 13, are you still the treasurer of his campaign and are you still endorsing him?

Doug and I started sending emails last year trying to push the district to do things differently. As I said in my long email in September, Doug decided to run for the board to try and make changes from "inside". He has taken the position that we should take the money and then try to fix the plan. I have taken the opposite position - from my perspective I have been consistent in calling for a Facilities Committee, expanding pre-K, and better fiscal management from the beginning. I think there are bigger problems in the district than the buildings. I can

see it's confusing but I'm supporting Doug as a school board candidate despite having different positions on the ballot issue. He has the background and experience that is lacking on the board. Whether the ballot issue passes or fails there will still be a need for good board members and for important decisions to be made. I am still his treasurer.

How does the current district plan correspond to the plan that you and Doug Wang proposed last year?

The proposal that Doug and I drafted was intended to reflect what we heard community members say they wanted and would support. It had 4 points:

- 1. Create universal pre-K (UPK) for ages 3 and 4**
- 2. Renovate all elementary building to a similar standard as Fernway**
- 3. Renovate Woodbury to become the new middle years school for grades 6-8**
- 4. Defer a decision on the HS for now**

The current plan that the school board put on the ballot has some matches but also some significant discrepancies:

1. There has been no commitment or meaningful progress towards creating UPK. There is discussion about renovating Ludlow for a new administration building with pre-K on the 1st floor. Every public statement has contained many qualifiers - "perhaps", "we will consider", "maybe". All discussions include the goal of charging "market rate" with a "sliding scale" for pre-K. Administrators have made public presentations including such phrases as "*we need to charge tuition so that they have skin in the game*". Apparently, that ceases to matter when a child turns 5 and is eligible for kindergarten. Much of what is being contemplated is "half-day" which doesn't meet the needs of the families who need pre-K the most. An outside private childcare provider is proposed so that children can stay in the building all day – the cost discussed is higher than the pre-K tuition. There is no plan for how to pay for pre-K - the 3.0 mill operating levy included in the ballot issue is nowhere close to enough. In short – there is a lot of talk and vague promises but meaningfully expanded pre-K, let alone UPK for ages 3 and 4, has not happened. A cynic would say this posturing around pre-K is intended to help pass the \$303 million building plan.
2. The plan does include renovating Boulevard, Lomond, Mercer & Onaway to a modern standard with some OFCC co-funding. Using the OFCC program, which is designed for building new buildings, adds requirements and costs. No serious attempt has been made to determine if there is a less disruptive and less expensive way to do this without OFCC. The plan also includes building another addition onto Fernway - apparently to avoid the long overdue need to adjust the race-based attendance zones from 40 years ago.

3. The plan does use Woodbury (or as Dr Glasner says “the Woodbury site”) for the middle years school. The OFCC document describes demolition of all of the Woodbury building except the section with the clocktower. Demolishing the entire building will require an easily obtained plan change after the election.
4. A decision on the HS was not deferred, demolition and the building of a new HS, 70% the size of the current HS, is clearly spelled out in the plan. Funding will require an additional ballot issue for additional taxes in a few years.

Why does the district maintain that fixing buildings as needed is more expensive than fixing all the buildings now?

Taking the 2017 \$30 million bond as a starting point and using certain assumptions results in a projected total cost of \$293 million when extrapolated thru 2066. This is greater than the \$223 million district share of the OFCC project. This does not adjust for the fact that almost 20% (\$5.7 million) of the 2017 bond was used for the Fernway fire renovation - not for building maintenance.

A more realistic approach might be to examine the actual capital spending in past years (\$16.8 million over 9 years - less than \$2 million/year) ([district document here](#)) which would extrapolate to \$86 million thru 2066 - a very different picture. Presumably the actual cost of maintaining the buildings while also doing needed renovations in a thoughtful incremental plan would be somewhere in the middle.

Why has the school board stopped taking public comments at their meetings?

They haven't stopped - but have made it much more difficult. In past years it was possible to submit comments online and have them read at the meeting. This was a way to be more inclusive of community members who had difficulty attending in person for employment, childcare, or physical disability reasons. As of January 2023, the comments are no longer read. Historically, the in-person public comment period was at the beginning of the meeting – a few minutes in. This year, beginning with the meeting where Onaway students attended to protect their garden, the agenda has been changed so that the public comment period is much later in the meeting – more than 1 1/2 hours for recent meetings. Unsurprisingly, there have been far fewer public comments offered. By contrast, City Council offers 2 comment periods during its meetings with in-person, submitted in advance, and Zoom comments welcomed.

Thank you for reading this far. I would appreciate hearing your perspective or questions 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

