

A few weeks ago, I wrote a long email outlining why I will be voting NO on the school ballot issue ([email text here](#)).

The summary from that email 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

Since that time there has been a League of Women Voters (LWV) sponsored forum on the ballot issue. ([view it here](#)) It's a little lopsided with both the board president and vice-president in their own auditorium – unfortunate that the LWV didn't choose a neutral location or equalize the number of panelists.

The LWV has also recently released the report from its Analysis Committee which spent several months researching the issues, interviewing school board members, administrators and other stakeholders ([here](#)). The committee report to the LWV Board states that “....*without a mechanism for stronger fiscal accountability and citizen oversight, the Committee is unable to recommend League Board support of the November 2023 School ballot issue.*”

Among the specific concerns described in the report were concerns about pre-K:

- “*The School Administration has not performed a current analysis of either demand for the program or barriers currently preventing enrollment. Nor has it analyzed the demand for a full day v half day program.*”

- *“During the 2022/23 school year, the School pre-K program was downgraded to four stars from its previous five star rating (highest) by the Ohio Department of Education Step Up to Quality program.”*

Specific concerns about the Facilities Plan included:

- *“The Committee has concerns about the lack of mechanisms in place to ensure the plan the voters approve is carried out over this long term project.”*
- *“The Administration has not yet replaced its recently retired Treasurer of 25 years. If the voters pass the levy in 2023, but in the future elect Board members running on an anti-levy campaign, the November 2023 ballot language will not guarantee the funds are used for the purposes of the Long-Term Strategic Plan as presented now.”*
- *“In addition, we are concerned that the relationship between the School Administration, the School Board and the Finance and Audit Committee has changed from the relationship existing previously. The current level of communication and cooperation among the entities and with citizens does not support the future monitoring of a very complex financial arrangement.”*
- *“Finally, we are not convinced that this Administration has the capacity in place at this time to successfully implement large scale change. In addition, our interviews with community leaders revealed a high level of community confusion and dismay regarding the detracking initiatives starting in grade 5.”*

As I wrote in my previous email and recapitulated 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 questions from readers:

### **Who is running for school board and what are their positions on the ballot issue?**

There are 4 candidates for the 2 school board seats in November.

- Andrea Boyd - has **not** endorsed
- Pamela M. Scott - has endorsed
- Douglas Wang - has endorsed
- Laura Whay Klein - has **not** endorsed

### **Are Shaker Heights school taxes really the highest rate in Ohio?**

The tax millage rate is available for all school districts from the Ohio Department of Taxation. The list of the highest 45 is ([here](#)). Shaker is currently listed at 83.07 mills, the proposed ballot issue would increase it to 93.02 mills, a 12% increase. This is only school taxes, it does not include City, County or Library taxes.

### **What happens to the taxes collected from the 3 mill operating levy (said to be for pre-K) which begin to be collected in January but pre-K at Ludlow will not begin until late in 2025?**

The ballot language for the 3 mill operating levy (estimated to raise \$2.8 million/year) does not require use for pre-K. The tax collected will go into the General Fund which already has \$65.7 million.

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.