

AT A GLANCE: LETTERS ABOUT C-P CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

To board member

Here is the text of a letter sent from Department of Local Government Finance Commissioner Cheryl Musgrave to Clark-Pleasant school board member Brian Drake:

"As you may know, the Clark-Pleasant Community School Corporation presented a controversial \$60 million school construction project to the Department of Local Government and Finance. In an effort to fully understand the community and the project, I have met with both sides, representatives of the school corporation and those who organized the remonstrance, so that I can make the most informed decision possible.

"After meeting with both sides and finding both arguments compelling, I asked my Deputy Commissioner, Tony Samuel, to contact Superintendent John T. Coopman yesterday. Mr. Samuel suggested that Superintendent Coopman meet with the remonstrators in hopes of bringing both sides together and bridging the gap that currently exists. Dr. Coopman indicated that he would do so only at the order of the school board. As such, I am respectfully requesting your cooperation in requiring a joint meeting of the Superintendent and the remonstrators.

"The deadline for my decision on this project is April 8, 2008, and I would prefer this meeting take place as soon as possible. I look forward to hearing from you soon."

From the board

Here is the text of a letter sent by the five Clark-Pleasant school board members to Cheryl Musgrave, commissioner of the Department of Local Government Finance:

"We are in receipt of a letter dated February 6, 2008, addressed to Mr. Brian Drake, a member of the Clark-Pleasant Community School Corporation Board of School Trustees. Please see our response as a Board of School Trustees regarding your request to meet with the remonstrators to 'bridge the gap'.

"As the fourth fastest growing school district in the state of Indiana, Clark-Pleasant Community School Corporation has utilized and maximized the

use of existing facilities to meet our rapid enrollment needs prior to seeking building new buildings in order to save our taxpayers as much money as possible. In response to our growing enrollments, we have utilized community task force members representing broad cross sections of our school/community to discuss options for meeting our enrollment growth needs. It is our philosophy that the schools belong to the community and should reflect their desires and expectations. Several public meetings and forums are held to solicit input from the community to share options and plans in open and transparent disclosure. However, as a Board of School Trustees, we as elected officials are ultimately responsible for developing and approving plans to best meet the needs of the school district now and for the future.

"As for the project unanimously approved by the Board of School Trustees to build a new middle school and utilize the existing middle school as a part of the high school campus and currently under review by your office; this project was developed by a task force of community members in at least 22 public sessions and further discussed in at least 8 other public forums for public input. The plan was unanimously approved by the Board of School Trustees at the publicly held 1028 hearing. Six hours prior to the scheduled 1028 hearing, a member of the task force heretofore had not stated a word of dissension, came forward to request the 1028 meeting be delayed. He was advised it would not be rescheduled. He and one other individual spoke against the proposed project at the 1028 meeting. He asked the board of school trustees if they would meet with him in the next 30 days to discuss 'options'. The board of school trustees granted said meetings. Members of the planning team met several times with Mr. Tad Bohlsen in the next 30 days. Members of the planning team did not feel any compelling arguments were presented to change or amend the proposed project. The Board of School Trustees opted to move forward and Mr. Bohlsen opted

to file for a petition remonstrance signature gathering process. Again, even after the filing for the petition remonstrance process, the administration and board did not hear opposition to the plan except for a few members of the public who had been apparently recruited by Mr. Bohlsen. By nearly a two to one margin, the Board of School Trustees won the petition remonstrance signature race in favor of moving forward with the proposed plan.

"Throughout over 30 public meetings and through a very public petition remonstrance signature gathering process, the public of the Clark-Pleasant Community School Corporation appeared to have spoken loudly in favor of the proposed project to meet the rapidly growing enrollment of the school district.

"During the 1028 hearings and during the public meetings, the Board of School Trustees had used a projected tax rate impact of 13.5 cents. However, with the increase of assessed valuation as a result of the last reassessment, the board is assuming a zero tax rate impact for this project. Of course, that does not take into account a new facility appeal to open the new facility. However, the public supported the project with a 13.5 cent tax rate impact.

"With the amount of openness and transparency involved with seeking input for this project and by the wide margin of support demonstrated by the number of signatures gathered in the petition remonstrance process, the Board of School Trustees, as elected by members of the school community, believe the proposed project to be in the best interest of the school corporation. Further, we believe the school district has more than complied with all statutory guidelines associated with the proposed project. Therefore, the Board of School Trustees must respectfully decline your offer to meet with the remonstrators to 'bridge the gap'. From our perspective, no gap exists. The proposed plan best meets the programmatic/educational needs as well as the enrollment growth needs of the school district now and in the near future."

ABOUT THE PROJECT

What it calls for

The district will pay \$54 million for construction of a new middle school, just east of Clark-Pleasant Intermediate School, 2111 Sheek Road. The two-story building will have space for 1,600 students. There will be three wings of classrooms, each with computer, science and art labs. There will be space for a football field and tennis courts, as well as room to add other athletics fields.

The \$6 million in renovations to the high school include expanding the cafeteria and parking lots and upgrading plumbing and heating and cooling systems.

The cafeteria at the existing middle school will be expanded and used as part of the high school campus.

How much

Taxpayers would pay about \$4.9 million a year for 27 years to pay off the \$60 million bond.

What has happened so far

July: An opposition group led by Tad and Vicki Bohlsen, People for Clark-Pleasant Schools, loses a remonstrance race against supporters of the school officials' plan. The school district collected 1,227 more signatures to move forward with a building plan that begins with a \$54 million middle school.

November: Department of Local Government Finance School Property Tax Control Board endorses the plan 5-4.

January: Department Commissioner Cheryl Musgrave meets with both sides over the project.

Feb. 6: School board members receive a letter from Musgrave asking them to direct Superintendent J.T. Coopman to meet with the opposition group.

Feb. 20: School board members deny Musgrave's request.

Impact

If the project passes, owners of homes valued at \$100,000 and \$150,000 would pay about \$108 and \$212 more per year, respectively.

Deadline

Musgrave has until April 8 to approve, deny or reduce the \$60 million project.

SOURCES: Department of Local Government Finance spokeswoman Mary Jane Michalak; Clark-Pleasant Community School Corp.