

MS School Board,

This is an open letter and has been shared with many voters/taxpayers in the Mahomet-Seymour School District.

I'm a lifelong resident of Mahomet and a graduate of Mahomet-Seymour High School and a parent of three Mahomet-Seymour students. As you're well aware, I've raised some concerns about the current direction of the District's building and facilities plans and the lack of any long-term, generational planning. I was given the privilege to meet with five of seven Board Members, two Co-Chairs of Bulldog Blueprint and Dr. Hall in December and January and I shared my concerns and some ideas with all of them at that time. Over the last few months, I've tuned in to the Board meetings and public comment and I heard several Bulldog Blueprint Committee members and Board members passionately and dramatically share the "need" for a new Jr. High. I've listened to people talk about how the kids "deserve" this new building/facility (although by the time anything is built the kids in that building will have moved on to another). I've listened to graduates of Mahomet-Seymour talk about their experiences and becoming successful community members because of their parents, coaches, teachers, staff, etc. Not one time have I heard a person say they are who they are because of a building and thinking back on my educational experience here in Mahomet, it's not the building that makes the school and I have deep gratitude for the people inside the buildings that gave so freely of their time, energy, passion and talents for every student that walked through the doors – the people, not the buildings, are what's most important.

Like you, I received my property tax bill in the mail this week and there was an increase over last year's taxes – the rate decreased slightly but the assessed value increased for me (and likely most property owners in Mahomet) and that trend will continue for the next several years with the inflated real estate market. You've voted to place a \$97M referendum on the June 28 ballot that will increase the residential tax burden dramatically at a time when inflation is at an all-time high for this generation of taxpayers. I've been frustrated about the information being shared and the Board's (seemingly) unwillingness to look at and consider other, viable and less expensive options to rectify and/or address the need for space in our buildings. No one can dispute the need for space, but we can discuss and research and determine the best way forward - together. A wise person once told me to be careful and deliberate about what information you consume and to ensure you're doing your own research and data collection to make good, sound decisions; sometimes what is shared is completely true but not truly complete, it seems. To this point, I feel like the Bulldog Blueprint Committee and this Board have shared information that's completely true; however, I don't believe it's truly complete.

There are, according to the Champaign County Clerk, 11,045 registered voters in the Mahomet-Seymour School District. According to the Bulldog Blueprint Committee, there were about 200 individuals that attended the Community Engagement Sessions (the Board report indicated over 450 people but that was counting the total attendance and repeat attenders – completely true but not truly complete). The Bulldog Blueprint reported that over 765 people had returned the survey as of January 2022. Of those, just 50% were familiar or very familiar with Bulldog Blueprint but that number was not reported (completely true but not truly complete). So, just 385 people (not sure if they are included in the 11,045 registered voters or not since there is no demographic information provided) were familiar with the Community Engagement process and Bulldog Blueprint. Additionally, from the same survey information, 64% of 765 respondents were in favor of building expansion; however, 83% opposed the tax increase

question to follow but this was not shared in the meeting and presentation (completely true but not truly complete). Does that concern/alarm you in any way? First, less than 7% of the voting population even responded and of those, 83% are opposed to a tax increase of \$41/month on a \$150K house (and, we all know that's well below the average home value in the District).

The truth is that this referendum will increase property taxes by a minimum of \$450 annually for a \$150K house and over \$1500/year for a \$450K house and that won't EVER decrease – bear in mind the average sale price for a house in Mahomet in August 2021 was just under \$300K and \$330K in April 2022. I wonder if there are ways to address the current issues/challenges that would be less of a financial burden while working toward the goal of something bigger and better in the future? I wonder if the next ten years will see the projected growth in population and commercial growth and what that means for the residential tax burden? I wonder if the “long range” plan that's been delivered is really “long range” – once the first shovel is turned, this project is over and supposedly carries the District to 2040 and that's not LONG RANGE, in my opinion.

The Bulldog Blueprint Community Engagement Sessions provided some limited opportunity to share ideas and information and not many were able or willing to participate, unfortunately. From the beginning, it seemed those that were participating felt it was best to work toward a new High School but that was quickly set aside because of the finances involved. So, why would we deviate in a way that doesn't work toward that goal in the future? The current proposal would build a new 144,000 square foot Jr. High School and athletic facilities next to Middletown Prairie (landlocked between a roadway and railroad) and add on and/or renovate current spaces in all other schools and “retire” and demolish an 88,000 square foot school building that could still be usable space. To put this all in perspective, the current High School is 205,000 square feet (more than twice the size of the current Jr. High); Lincoln Trail is 76,000 square feet; and, Middletown Prairie is 122,000 square feet.

According to the cost estimates provided during Bulldog Blueprint, the 144,000 square foot building has a rough price tag of around \$50M (half of the proposed amount of the referendum). What if that were an elementary school? That is nearly twice the size of the current Lincoln Trail (76,000 square feet) and could house all of Lincoln Trail and potentially provide overflow space for Middletown Prairie next door. That also opens a 76,000 square foot building (current Lincoln Trail) across the street from the 88,000 square foot Jr. High and those two buildings could be used for grades 6-8 with a total of 164,000 square feet of space which is nearly twice the size of the current Jr. High School and larger than the proposed new Jr. High. Of course, there would need to be some improvements made to both buildings to continue to utilize them for the next 10 years as you plan and work toward the larger goal of a High School; however, that list and budget has never been shared and there's sales tax money and other budgeted maintenance money that could be put toward these improvements. I'm guessing that a \$60M project could solve the problem today and decrease the tax burden and allow the District to work toward the next, larger project in the next 10-15 years.

So, I have a few questions I'd like you to consider...

Is it wise to build a Jr. High on property next to a Pre-K-2nd grade? Doesn't it make more sense for now and the future, to create a Pre-K to 5th Grade campus?

Is it wise to build a Jr. High on property that has little room for expansion and growth (bordered by a roadway and railroad tracks)?

Is it wise to demolish a building (for \$1M) when space and classrooms are at a premium?

What is the value of the proposed building site at the Middletown Prairie property now that the roadway and infrastructure have been (or will be) completed?

What is the real cost of making improvements at the current Jr. High to continue utilizing that building for the next 10-15 years?

What is the Plan B if/when this referendum fails?

How realistic are the projected costs and completion timelines associated with this plan given the inflationary rate(s) and supply chain challenges?

How does the current/proposed plan impact future building plans and growth? If the new building is a Jr. High, what's the current High School's use and plan in the future? It's twice the size of the current Jr. High and 65,000 square feet bigger than the proposed new building so it could undoubtedly be utilized as a Jr. High in the future.

What is the long-range, generational plan? A 10–15-year plan is not LONG TERM and the excuse that we can't look into the future that long isn't valid, in my opinion. You have a responsibility to plan and if that plan isn't what's best as the time approaches, you pivot and change and adapt as you should be doing right now. Maybe it will become clear that a new Jr. High is a better option down the road; or, maybe it would become clear that building a new athletic facility and add on to the High School is the best option; or, maybe there will be dramatic commercial tax growth and TIF District income that makes the financial picture much different but without a generational, long-range plan none of that is or can be considered.

Are there better, less expensive options that would work and carry the District through this difficult time?

In your own household, if you had a project you wanted to work toward, would you spend all your money or borrow against your mortgage to do something completely different and push your goal(s) aside? If you couldn't afford the new car you want, would you buy one that costs nearly as much and forego that dream/goal or would you make what you have work and maintain it and save until you could reach your goal?

My intent and hope is that all those that read this will take time to research this very important issue and take the time to educate themselves on the referendum question and its impact on their household and the District in the short and long term. I hope that voters will begin to ask appropriate questions and take time to vote. All the information I've shared here is available at the Bulldog Blueprint website - <https://sites.google.com/ms.k12.il.us/bulldogblueprint/home?authuser=0> – please take some time to review the information there and ask questions and make the best decision for you, your family and the District. And, if you're not already registered to vote, visit - [Register To Vote | Champaign County Clerk](#) for more information.

Thank you!

Joshua R. Jessup