

MS School Board,

First and foremost, thank you! I have had the privilege to speak with five of seven board members about Bulldog Blueprint and the current direction of the Board, District and Community over the last month or so and I'm grateful for the time and conversations.

I have also been given time to talk with Jim Risley and Jama Grotelueschen about Bulldog Blueprint and I've spent some time talking with Dr. Hall as well. And, as you might imagine, I've spoken with community members and voters too. I attended the first two Bulldog Blueprint offerings but with schedules changing and work/family obligations, I was unable to attend any others but I have kept up online throughout.

From my perspective, the Bulldog Blueprint group has done a tremendous job trying to engage and include the community and they have done an admirable job working through and identifying some needs, opportunities and challenges related to space, building features and considerations, infrastructure and community considerations. I believe their charge was the "what" and they've done amazing work identifying the "what"; however, in my estimation, "the how" is not the role of that group.

So, I'm writing to request that you all consider hiring an outside/independent firm or group to look at "the how" – to determine where schools should be in our community, what's available, what's needed, what land/property could be purchased or negotiated in to a future purchase and how to make that all work together.

Again, this is my opinion/perspective – when meeting with the Board members, I did not hear a resounding and supportive tone that building a Jr. High on the currently owned property next to a K-2 school was the best option. I also heard that doing a land/development study was a good idea. So, I'm hopeful the Board will act on that immediately rather than wait another 6 months to take that necessary and fiscally responsible step.

There is a very clear (again, my opinion) sense of urgency to do something right now and I understand the identified and real need for space; however, I can not and will not support the plan as it stands without some explanation and planning for the future. The MS School Board and District have a long history of planning for 10-20 years and that's precisely why we are where we are...I'm hopeful this Board will begin to take a generational look and make bigger, broader plans. The sense of urgency created within the Bulldog Blueprint is clouding rational thought and there is no plan for future expansion or growth beyond the piece of property that is currently being discussed. I've posed this question to those I've had the opportunity to speak with – if you had all the money available right now, would you build that school on that piece of property? I've not heard a resounding, YES, to that question ever. So, why are we even considering that then? So, in short - the sense of urgency is evident and somewhat justifiable but when given a choice do to something that would be productive and helpful, some believe it's best (and ok) to sit on your hands and wait? Makes little sense...

In my conversations, there were a couple themes I identified regarding the justification to wait to hire someone to study land and development: it will confuse the voters; and, this should have been done years ago. First, I would ask that you give people some credit...we live in a community of brilliant people who can and will make educated decisions. I contend you've had roughly 1% of the voting population

participating in the Bulldog Blueprint thus far so you'll be providing good, solid information to the other 99% if/when you responsibly look at all options and avenues for future planning, building and expansion so I don't believe that argument holds any water at all. Secondly, that sentiment that this should have been done years ago is absolutely correct – this most certainly should have been done years ago but it wasn't and now you have an opportunity to do it right. When's the best time to plant a tree? 20 years ago – but, when's the second best time? NOW!

I've also offered this idea when I've spoken with those that gave me the time – build a school on that property but not a Jr. High. I understand the Jr. High is where the space issue is today but that does not mean we need a new Jr. High today. Here's my idea/plan for your consideration...build a new elementary school and create a K-5 campus on the east side of town allowing for more growth there without filling the entire property. Then, you've vacated Lincoln Trail that's within a couple hundred yards of your current Jr. High so you could utilize it as a second Jr. High and share resources – maybe an Orange Team Middle School and a Blue Team Middle School? You may also be able to move the Transportation Center to Middletown Prairie too. This project would cost much less initially and allow bonds to be freed up faster and provide some breathing room and time to plan the next step/phase of building and development as defined by the independent firm you hire to study land, development and infrastructure. This would be a smaller price tag and possibly a bit less overwhelming to voters. This could show the community you're being diligent and responsible and have a plan for growth and development and you're doing all you can to responsibly steward the financial resources and current facilities. I understand there are logistical concerns and physical concerns with the current Jr. High; however, I've not seen any concrete figures for the "NEEDS" (not wants) to make that building safe and usable for another 10 years. I'd encourage you to consider this idea and throw it around a bit and poke holes in it and put some pen on paper to understand what it really means financially.

And, while you're discussing and poking holes...consider what could happen in 10 years of time in this growing community too. What is the commercial growth going to do to the tax revenue and how will that impact the residential tax burden for the next project? When will the TIF District revenues be available and what does that do to the annual budget and the schedule to pay down bonds? What infrastructure changes and improvements could be made in ten years? What kind of planning and preparation work could be done in those ten years to be better situated for the next project? What can be done now and over the next ten years with the already available sales tax funding in Champaign County?

You have an opportunity to set this District on a path to generational success right now – this is not the first time this District has been here and it won't be the last time but I believe this Board can right some wrongs and move things in a positive direction by being thoughtful and inclusive and rational. I always consider it a great privilege to discuss ideas and thoughts with any of you at any time and my phone is always on.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service!

Joshua R. Jessup