

**Prepared Notes for Board Meeting - Turf**

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I have nothing against turf and nothing but gratitude for the people who worked so hard to raise money to provide turf for our student athletes, however, I cannot in good conscious support the request for taxpayer subsidy of this project. There are many ideas and suggestions for program augmentation in our school district and numerous requests for additional facilities. It has been a constant disappointment to me that I've been unable to impress upon the powers that be in this district the importance of identification, of prioritization, and of making choices. The fact that we are sitting on large bank balances makes this much more important because after all, it's much easier to say no when you're broke.

Let's go back to 2012 for a second. We run an operating levy in good faith but using a set of absolute worst case scenarios, promise that the levy wasn't to add anything new, scare the bejesus out of people over what would happen if it didn't pass, celebrate when the worst case scenarios don't actually happen and find ourselves with cash reserves at something like 3 times the already-high GFOA recommended amount. We run a bond levy with an amount that was not based on a rigorous evaluation of need but rather, based on what mathematically could be covered without raising millage requirements to pay back principal and interest. In dozens of forums, we told our constituents the money for Maintenance, Technology and Buses. The end result is that virtually all reasonable financial constraints have been removed from the Worthington School District, at least for now. Why is this relevant? Because it's a fact that if Worthington, at this moment in time, wasn't sitting on relatively large balances in the general fund, in the bond fund and apparently, in the PI fund, we wouldn't be having this discussion right now.

For two years now, I've been pleading with the powers that be in this school district to figure out what to do with those funds, remembering that it is essentially one time money and that the confluence of events that created it is unlikely to repeat anytime soon. Essentially, I've been asking if we should save it to prolong the life of the levy, give it back or spend it.

The administration has given lip service to using it to prolong the life of the levy but has refused to commit to a reasonable extension in writing. In fact, the administration's written resource management goal still says we might run a levy next year (2016) despite having a 65 million dollar cash reserve. A levy extension goal must be purposeful and it must be in writing and so far, it is neither.

I'm not opposed to spending some of the money. The only thing I've asked is that the administration decide when it wants to run the next operating and/or bond levy and calculate how much we can spend and still accomplish that objective. We can then

prioritize those resources to augment the academic and extra-curricular programs – in other words, do some long term planning for both the programming and the levy cycle.

Which brings us to tonight's vote. We've done none of this prioritization, at least so far as I know. If we had, would turf have come to the top of the list? I have no idea, but I do think we should have had the discussion. Instead, I've been given two main arguments in favor of subsidizing turf with taxpayer dollars.

First, I've been told that we're using interest on the bond fund and not the bond fund itself, so that makes it OK that turf was not included in the original bond fund proposal. That sounds good until we stop and think about where all that interest money came from. Essentially, we borrowed money sooner than we needed to, banked the money and that generated the interest. In other words, we extracted money from our constituent's bank accounts that we had no immediate need for to keep in our bank account, allowing us to generate interest instead of our constituents generating interest. Of course, at the time, spending the interest money was not part of the equation – rates were low and unlikely to go lower so it was a good time to borrow money, however, we could have just as easily used the interest to reduce debt service or even transfer that money to the general fund and bank it as part of making the operating levy last as long as possible. Regardless, there is no difference between funding this project using bond money, interest on the bond money or general fund money – it's all fungible.

Second, I've been told that we have an equity issue in that Thomas Worthington has turf so WKHS should have it as well. Let's think about that for a second. Are we now saying that as policy, if one building does sufficient fund raising to purchase something that other buildings don't have, it will be up to the taxpayer to subsidize the acquisition of that thing for all other buildings? We are now setting that precedent. And let's talk about equity as it applies to academics. WKHS has an international baccalaureate opportunity for students – why not Thomas? Thomas has a business academy for students – why not Kilbourne? What about at the elementary grades? Slate Hill has a Spanish program but 10 other buildings do not. Our policy, up until now, is that we don't want cookie cutter schools. That implies that it's possible for one building to have something that the other building does not. If that's going to change and I sure hope it does not, it at least warrants a discussion.

So, while I respect the WKHS turf committee for what they've accomplished, I cannot rubber stamp the administration's request for a taxpayer subsidy without the district first doing the necessary ground work for identification of the next operating and bond levies and a prioritization of spending to get us there.