

*Political power play***School bond opposition group presents no plan, no financials***By RD Volkman*

Climbing three flights of stairs to where former school boards held their regular meetings has been abandoned for some years now, but the specter of it looms large for those who did regularly attend those meetings, and the relief of attending school board meetings on the first floor level in the grade school library was palpably pleasant in comparison. Such was the crowd of some one hundred citizens who attended Monday's meeting—pleasant.

The Board went through its routine business and invited "Audience Communications," whereupon numerous citizens held forth on school bond topics. Some mulled over rumored tidbits, while others were simply curious about various items. These ruminations and questions the Board fielded and answered, or didn't answer because they didn't have the information, often they rifled through pages of past documents looking for specifics to particular questions. Some questions were simply unanswerable like how many desks would fit into certain classrooms for example. Such questions were not bad questions, but they hadn't been considered before because it doesn't fit an architect's criteria for designing a school. So, such questions were a surprise to the Board, but entirely reasonable for a person who was simply curious about how many desks would fit into a room. The kicker to it all is that desks come in different sizes, which means a thirty-desk kindergarten room would be smaller than a thirty-desk eighth grader room if rooms were designed according to

such desk capacity. The additional question is if classrooms are a standard size or vary by class and usage. Those imponderables are left to Architects and illustrates why school boards hire experienced professionals to design buildings.

Some were curious to know how much the school was paying the architect, and Board explained he gets paid a percent of the project when it is done. It took some explaining that the Architect doesn't get paid until after a bond is passed and the job done—unless the Board would happen to sever the contract prior to completion. In which case, the Board has an hourly rate schedule for services already accomplished by the architectural firm. The firm would then send a bill to the school for about, now, two years of work and services. Then the Board could restart the process with another firm, essentially doubling the cost, up to this point, of the architectural work.

Leon Conrad made the point that per pupil costs ought to be calculated over the eighty or so years of usage gotten out of the current building. Rather than the 5,000 dollars per pupil costs experienced today, per pupil costs in the early days may not have been one tenth as much. Leon was looking at the average. But that doesn't take inflation into consideration one fellow noted after the meeting, which is exactly the point the board has been making all along—what seems high today, won't be tomorrow.

An opposition group was on the agenda to make a presentation, and a representative read a statement,



**A very civil crowd of nearly one hundred attend School Board meeting**

but made no sign it had a plan or any figures to present. Rather, they demanded a place at the table. They wanted to meet with the Board privately. It was a real power play—power politics. They brought nothing to the table. Just a demand for a private meeting and a threat any bond would be defeated. They explained they were a private organization and had no requirement to conduct their business in public. Doug Rickett, Board President, explained they were publicly elected and were constrained by law to conduct their business in an open pub-

lic forum.

Doug invited them to be on the next meeting's agenda and to bring a plan and figures. Less than a quo-

rum of the board might meet with them in a committee setting.

The meeting continued on with regular business.

## **August 18, 2005, Front Page of the Nebraska Journal-Leader:**

### **Paragraph four:**

**“...per pupil costs ought to be calculated over the eighty or so years of usage gotten out of the current building. Rather than the 5,000 dollars per pupil costs experienced today...”**

Eighty or so years? This is nothing more than an attempt by the “Pride” group to divert attention away from and justify the extraordinary costs of the past proposals.

Actual per pupil cost of the last bond proposal was over **\$51,000**. This was based on total school costs of \$10,280,000 (a bond of \$9,780,000 and \$500,000 from the existing building fund) versus the approximately 200 students in grades 7-12 in the 2004-2005 school year. The 2005-2006 student count is now down to approximately 193 students, per information provided in the August 15, 2005, school board meeting.

### **Paragraph five:**

**“An opposition group was on the agenda...”**

**“...made no sign it had a plan or any figures to present.”**

**“...a demand for a private meeting...”**

**“...Less than a quorum of the board might meet with them in a committee setting.”**

What plan does the school board have? As of now, no plan is being put forth. We are asking the board to invite representatives of our sizable group to the table rather than questionable committees that were used before the last election. Not once did we ask for a private meeting. Rather, we requested a smaller committee meeting, like was stated at the end of the article.

# EDITORIAL

## How South Sioux got two grade schools for the price of two.

South Sioux City got two grade schools for the price of two. And the way they did it was to propose one grade school for the town at some suitable site. The voters slammed it down in the bond election. The North end of town was worried the school would end up on the South side of town and the Southiders were worried the school would end up on the north side of town. So the School Board compromised. They proposed two schools, one school for each side of town, at a greater bond price. The Bond passed for the double school proposal, which isn't a lot different than Ponca and Jackson's situation. Each have separate grade schools. Jackson's was largely a gift, a free one, from Congressman Bereuter for which everyone can be thankful.

So now it rests with all of us to get a high school built. Jackson voters might ought to know that the city of South Sioux rescued the county from higher taxes on the jail situation. The city donated a years worth of the half-cent sales taxes, (through the development corporation) providing farmers a bit of tax relief. Furthermore, the jail tax isn't going to last all that long providing further tax relief to property owners. All this demonstrates that elected officials can and do solve knotty problems for the people.

### School Board ought to not meet with un-elected group

We hate to see the school board meet privately with the opposition group. We don't think that is the right way to go. These un-elected individuals made a power play and seem to have gotten away with it. We would advise the Board members to not spend much time with them if it appears they have no plan or financial calculations to bring to the table. This group seems to have swayed people toward a lowball bond figure that is inadequate for school building needs. What they are proposing is simply to defeat any realistic plan regardless of school needs. We wish more of the people who appeared in the last meeting had been attending meetings all along. They all say they want a new school, but they never say what their definition of a "new school" is. It is lip service only they appear to offer. It is basically a small cabal that is providing much of the misinformation to voters. Also, it appears there is a small group of folks who wouldn't vote for a school at any cost. It is these folks who appear willing to go to any length to defeat a school bond. This cabal wants concessions, and when granted one they will demand another, and so it will go *ad infinitum*.

### Waterbury in growth area.

Someone cited WNAX radio last night, saying how blighted the Randolph area is, trying to paint Dixon and Dakota county as being in the same fix. Cedar County did lose population in the last census. But Dakota, Dixon, Thurston and Wayne counties all gained population. Dakota County had a 21 percent growth. Best of all, South Sioux City is in the midst of a boom, and it bodes well for all the towns surrounding it. Waterbury will grow, Jackson will grow, Ponca will grow, Hubbard will grow, Emerson will grow, Allen will grow, Newcastle will grow, Martinsburg will grow, Wakefield will grow. Dakota City is in the midst of growth right now. We are seeing only the beginning of regional growth. All these towns can grow more if they are prepared. Jackson seems well situated and Ponca is getting there. The Ponca business district would be well advised to all get on the same page. Those businesses who are not supporting the school effort might consider expanding their operations to one of the other growth towns. The question is whether Waterbury or other growth towns would go to any trouble to recruit these businesses on the premise they might possess good leadership traits. *Editor.*

## **August 18, 2005, Editorial Page of the Nebraska Journal-Leader:**

### **Paragraph three:**

**“We hate to see the school board meet privately with the opposition group.”**

We agree completely, but who asked for this private meeting? As the editor knows, it wasn't the ABC's Committee. Again, we have requested a smaller committee meeting to address all of the issues and possible alternatives.

Furthermore, why invite the majority of the voters, as demonstrated in the two earlier bond votes, to the table when one can continue to bang one's head against the wall further delaying the need for upgraded educational facilities. Does ignoring the majority serve the school district well?

### **Paragraph four:**

**“Someone cited WNAX radio last night, saying how blighted the Randolph area is...”**

Who exactly is “someone”? Is “someone” a reporter? Is “someone” a good enough source to base an editorial on? In fact, Randolph was not the basis of the report. Rather it was Crofton, which has been used by the “Pride” group as an example of growth that can stem from a new school.

“Excellent” reporting indeed. Had a simple search been done on WNAX's website, the facts could have been obtained. Ah, but alas it is the editorial page, not necessarily fact.