July 27, 2019

To All Media

From Halli Stone, D93 Citizens Spokesman

KEY POINTS OF UPCOMING AUGUST BOND ELECTION

The August 27 District 93 bond election will soon be upon us. Absentee ballots will be mailed no later than July 29, and early voting will soon follow. For these reasons, D93 Citizens feels it imperative that local news outlets have in hand the following information, in order to fairly report on this election.

We believe this is an important election and that it merits perhaps multiple news stories covering the tax implications and what we consider to be unneeded add-ons at huge costs. We invite you to start covering this story soon. Please note: D93 Citizens supported the last bond for a new middle school. However, we are firmly opposed to the August 27 bond.

Below are some of our key objections to the proposed bond. Each point includes the pertinent sources of information. Please read on:

1.This bond will raise taxes to add on to Bonneville and Hillcrest High Schools. (Source: June 26 Board meeting, contained in its entirety on the D93 Facebook page, with an excerpt on the Vote No D93 Bond Facebook page.) In 2014 and 2015, while pitching the new high school, which became Thunder Ridge HS, the district administration told the community the “core capacities” of these two schools was maxed out and it was impossible to build additions. (Again, quotes are re-posted on the Vote No D93 Bond Facebook page.) Furthermore, the district hosted 4 community meetings in which they reiterated these claims. Where is the truth? Why the difference between then and now? What changed between 2014-15 and 2019?

2. Thunder Ridge HS, Bonneville HS and Hillcrest are each at about 80% capacity. (Source: D93 15 Year Growth Plan.) We ask: is adding on to schools with existing capacity for 20% more students the top need of the district?

3. The August 27 bond will be expensive for taxpayers. Clearly, property values have gone up dramatically this year. The Bonneville County Assessor reports across all types of property, valuations have increased around 15%. (Source: county assessor, and property tax statements.) The district claims the levy rate will remain the same, should the bond pass. However, with higher valuations, this will result in a BIG tax increase. (Source: ballot prepared by Bonneville County Elections, on the D93 website in meeting packet for June 26 school board meeting. <https://v3.boardbook.org/Public/PublicAgenda.aspx?ak=1000818&mk=50291361>) Ballot language states, “according to current market conditions” this bond will cost taxpayers an average of $92 in NEW taxes each year for every $100,000 of property value they own. The County Assessor provided numbers for the average home valuation in District 93, which is $216,152, resulting in a tax increase from this bond of $106.86 for the average home owner. This will be a BIG tax increase that will last 17 years. Homes will average at least $106.86 per year- perhaps more. To be clear, most likely the district will be making small payments for this new proposed bond for first few years and exploding into giant payments at the end, hence the new tax will average $106.86 per year for the average homeowner, under current market conditions.

4. This bond, at great expense, moves the Hillcrest High School office to the south, away from the key entrance near the movie theater, and out of the heart of the school. The district claims this is for security purposes. A simple video camera, costing only a few hundred dollars, would allow greater security and views of school entrances, rather than a remodel costing millions of dollars. (Source: Mr. Pymm’s discussion on the D93 Facebook page posting of the June 26 board meeting.) D93 Citizens believe this is a frivolous, expensive use of taxpayer dollars.

5. In the past, groups that supported previous bonds quoted quoted the Bonneville County Sheriff’s Office, who stated that adding on to the high schools would decrease the safety of the students. (Source: Advocates for Education Facebook page. A screenshot of the post is also included on the Vote No D93 Bond Facebook page.)

6. The District 93 school board plans to ask for an additional 2 or 3 bonds, with accompanying new taxes, just to update the high schools. Plans include new flooring and massive changes to classrooms at Bonneville High School. (Source: June 26 D93 board meeting video on their Facebook page, and the meeting packet for the same meeting.) Apparently, a fee-based architect, who stands to make big money on this project, has advised the board that existing classrooms are inadequate for student learning, and the spaces must be remodeled. These sorts of projects- especially new flooring at Bonneville- should be covered by short-term plant facilities funds, without asking for a long-term, expensive bond.

7. District 93 administration claims high school science labs are in drastic need of upgrades. If this is true, who fell asleep at the wheel? D93 employs people, paid with our tax dollars, to keep all school buildings in good repair. Taxpayers pay millions of dollars in plant facility and supplemental levies to keep the schools, and science labs, in top shape. District administrators claimed, in Post Register articles published in 2019, that the condition of the labs is deplorable. If this is actually true, the district administration and their plant facility employees must be held accountable for allowing schools to fall into disrepair. They have failed district patrons and students. Heads should roll. Is it possible the conditions described were allowed to occur to bolster this request for a new bond and new taxes? If so, it is difficult to conceive of a more disgraceful or shameful ploy to influence taxpayers. (Source: earlier Post Register articles quoted at Vote NO D93 Bond Facebook page)

8. The majority of the proposed bond would pay to add on to existing below-capacity schools. However, it also includes $19m to build an elementary school. (Source: D93 June 26 meeting notes on their website.) If this one elementary school is truly needed, it should stand on its own merits and have its own bond election. If taxpayers agree, it will pass.

9. District 93 did not get an overall bid for the additions to Hillcrest HS and Bonneville HS. The price has already jumped up by $3 million, and most likely will continue to increase. (Source: D93 Facebook page, video of June 26 meeting.) The district originally told patrons they needed $39m, but now the bond is up to $42m. (<https://www.idahoednews.org/news/bonneville-mulling-38-8-million-bond-issue-long-range-growth-plan/>) This is what happens when administrators do NOT ask for and agree on a bid price at the beginning. And taxpayers pay the price for such mismanagement.

10. The district has selected a Utah-based construction manager for the Bonneville High School additions, taking work away from local firms. (Source: June 26 district meeting video.) We know many taxpayers object to out-of-area contractors benefiting from this proposed construction, even though some sub-contractors will be local. An out-of-state firm should not be chosen for this big project.

11. “Advocates for Education in Bonneville School District 93”, also known as the “yes group”, promised in a full page newspaper ad in 2015 that no additional bonds would be needed until 2025, if only the community would give them the new high school. Of course, that proved to be completely false, as more bonds continue to be proposed, each with the accompanying new taxes. (Source: a photo of the ad is on the Vote No D93 Bond Facebook page. The “2025” claim is the third point on the left.) In fact, the district’s own 15-year plan calls for MANY more bonds. Why did the district remain silent as more than 100 citizens signed their names to a full-page lie? Was the district, along with the Advocates, hoping D93 voters would forget this promise?

12. Advocates for Education in Bonneville School District 93 promised the new high school, Thunder Ridge, would only cost taxpayers the price of a fountain drink each month. However, D93 is now the most highly-taxed large district in the state. (Source: <https://www.eastidahonews.com/2019/06/bonneville-d93-to-increase-39-5-million-bond-issue/> and the ad mentioned in “No new bonds until 2025” as mentioned above).

13. On the Vote No District 93 Bond Facebook page, many taxpayers have expressed outrage at a $191,000 bonus paid by the district to outgoing superintendent Chuck Shackett. This was not a contract buy-out for his early retirement, but bought Chuck a higher taxpayer-funded pension. (Source: <https://www.idahoednews.org/east-idaho/bonneville-trustees-approve-six-figure-retirement-payout-to-shackett/>) This is called “pension spiking”, and is now illegal in the State of Idaho. The district failed to discuss this pay-out in public meetings, and attempted to conceal the details, even refusing FOIA requests. (Source: <https://www.idahoednews.org/news/trustees-concealed-shacketts-six-figure-payout/>) Many feel this shocking betrayal of the public trust, combined with the mismanagement and misinformation described above, makes many patrons question the judgment of the D93 administration and board.

In spite of the information presented above, the District 93 school board and administration are asking taxpayers for more money. D93 Citizens urges ALL taxpayers to read and learn for themselves, then to VOTE NO on August 27. Again, please include the above information in all news stories regarding this ill-advised bond.