



Deer Park
SCHOOL DISTRICT

26 February 2024

Deer Park School District and Community
Attn: School Board, Superintendent, and Constituents
N. 428 Main
Deer Park, Washington 99006

Sequence: 2024-00xxx,
Title: My Report Assessment of the Non-Passage of DPSD Proposition, #2 (Bond) on 13 February 2024

Dear School Board, Superintendent, Staff, and Constituents:

In my initial assessment there are several factors that led to the non-passage of the DPSD Proposition, #2 (Bond). Most are derived from public comments. Some assessments came from me prior and after becoming a School Board Director. I want to thank Steve Howard, who spend his entire Wednesday afternoon last week to further educate me on bond and facilities (post, present, and future), and Brendon Myers for taking almost 2 hours for our initial discussions on DPSD financial bookkeeping and bond matters last Thursday.

The most notable public comment was the lack of an overall "Plan" or "Architecture," which I believe is the largest negative factor, and I addressed it in my campaign. Despite the extreme overcrowding at Arcadia (475 current students at a designed for 300 student facility) and the atrocious bus garage conditions/working environment, the voters essentially said, "Yes, we know it's bad, but we're not voting 'yes' until we have a comprehensive plan." While there is a wealth of information within the DPSD to support both short and long terms projects, we need to pull this information together into two distinctive "named" plans that are clear, accurate, and readily available. Both plans would include as much data and graphical representations as possible. The short-term plan could be called the "DPSD 10 year Capital Improvements for August 2024 to 2034." It would be flexible enough to change when higher priority projects must move forward, accommodate emergency fixes or state mandated updates. Today, it would include the widening of the high school football field by moving old bleachers, replacing old bleachers with new ones, building a girls' softball field, and reengineering/remodel of the elementary roof. The second long range strategic plan could be called the "25 Year Strategic Planning for DPSD, August 2024 to 2049" and would reference the 10-year plan to ensure they stay in lock step of each other. The strategic plan will outline and address the following example facets: Availability of existing school land to build new facilities, State mandates, requirement of 20 acres for all new schools, land and road agreements with Deer Park City for new land purchase by 31 December 2027. This is just a tip of the iceberg.

Negative public comments on "communication" was the second leading contributor to the bond not passing. While the DPSD did put out considerable amount of information out though school website,

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Deer Park SCHOOL DISTRICT

multi-media, public talks, etc., considerable negative feedback came back about the actual data and the flyer/poster graphics. Some voters did not like having to hunt down information in various locations that should have been in the voter's pamphlet. The voters also did not believe the "projected" school population data, and neither do I because I have already witnessed first-hand data manipulation of student population data. DPSD stated the middle school improvements were done, but yet the middle school was listed on the bond. This sends a conflicting message to the voters. When the DPSD publishes bond information, it must include all "pertinent" information even if it appears negative. For example, some voters felt surprised with the bond being carried 21 years. Sure, the new high school was a 20 year bond, but voters of today don't want to go that long without a clear strategic plan to address all facets of the district and with better data to support it. We need a better way to show the math on how "state matching" is calculated. I just learned that "state matching" will not be funded until the school in question meets its 30th year anniversary, and neither Arcadia (2027) or the Elementary (2028) schools are there yet. At this point, I believe we may need to explore the possibility of two 10-year bonds back to back or a slightly shorter 18 year bond. The second 10 year bond would require voter approval after the first bond is paid off. We might consider other hybrid approaches. It hasn't been discussed yet, but moving the transportation facility will save DPSD around \$15,000/year in fuel costs and labor, which reduces almost \$40,000/year, according to my quick calculations. Could the transportation facility be built first to support its cost savings while the new elementary school mitigates construction inflation by doing road, utility, and ground prep work up front.

During the bond review, voters questioned how the DPSD was able to fund the Middle School expansion without a bond. The public answer was "We saved." We need to explain this better to the voters that after we receive operating funds (\$9,500/traditional student, \$9,000/Homelink student) for all students and pay all expenses (salaries, school supplies, operating/maintenance expenses, etc.), there is a remaining operating fund balance, which the DPSD can use to address a variety of needs, including capital improvements like the Middle School, which it did receive "State matching." The school district has been able to put away \$850K/year to address the "future needs" while ensuring solvency for a facilities emergencies or state mandates.

The bond flyer/poster boards showed an artist rendition of the refurbished Arcadia for Homelink, and it mistakenly depicted a "5-star hotel lobby" to our voters. This further depicts DPSD did not have an accurate plan and published in a rush. The voters did not see the conceptual blueprints, which I understand better conveys the actual Homelink environment. The voters also need to know that it's a 2-year process when a bond passes until school construction starts. During the 2-year process, requirements are gathered, design bids are collected, designs are drawn, school design is selected then the school construction bids process starts. The voters might not know that the State has a heavy presence in the entire process, because if the State is contributing, it will want to ensure successfully completion. Before I discuss the design of the new elementary school, let me share our daughter will be joining her other 3rd grade classmates in the portables this fall. Why do 3rd graders reside in the portables? Because they are smaller and logistically speaking fit better in smaller rooms. Our daughter and her classmates will never attend the new school. The current artist "cluster of buildings" rendition



Deer Park SCHOOL DISTRICT

of the new elementary is a poor design. It does not maximize southern sunlight exposure for energy savings and mandated “student wellness” with natural light. The design does not afford future expansion, which all future school designs should have to minimize tax dollars in the future. Speaking of energy, we have a looming “must comply with new WA energy codes” for new and older commercial buildings. WA State is pushing to get all commercial buildings off natural gas and back to strictly electric. Therefore, our future schools must be flexible to changing energy sources. In all, part of the “improved communication” with the voters is focused on providing enhanced bond supporting materials to answer their questions. If the supporting materials seems to fall short, we rework, add more detail, and republish. It will be cyclic process, and we must embrace it to answer the voter’s questions.

The third negative factor to the bond is taxes. I believe to mitigate voter concerns on this topic is to 1) provide two or three simple typical household tax examples with real data 2) provide a “user friendly” simple online tax calculator tool that voters can use with their own property tax information with plenty of “user help” guides/samples, and 3) an online tax tool that shows “what ifs”, including how the taxes will go down as the community grows and the tax burden is spread. I believe the strategy is to give voters better tools to let them make informed independent decisions.

Bond/levy marketing was seen mostly as very positive, but when the negative public comments come forward, “bond/levy promoters” must remain “warm and positive” and neutral in the eyes of the voters. It’s a continuous loop of updating information and getting it to the voters when asked. When establishing forums, tours, or community talks, consider both parents work. Some negative public comments centered on “more school board” involvement, and I agree. Superintendent Alexa, School Board Director Lindsay and the bond/levy supports worked on the bond/levy very hard for a long time. More of the “informing the public” burden belongs to school board because we must ultimately promote the bond and answer to the voters. Publishing a 10-year and 25-year strategic plans with public feedback will be a positive step to getting the required voter bond support. Although I heard there may be “lack of staff support” for the bond, I believe that most staff actually do support it, but do so “quietly” to remain neutral and stay out of the politics. I wholeheartedly believe our staff will always support what their school needs in their own special way. I have already seen how so many are working so hard within the current facility situations and happily doing so without complaining. This includes the leadership and drivers at the bus garage. And so many are helping hundreds of students that fell behind during COVID. In all, our entire staff have their hands full. Let the school board carry more weight.

During the 20 February Special Meeting to discuss the “non-passage of the bond,” a number of suggestions (surveys, questionnaires, target mailings, etc.) were discussed to move forward to the new bond in November. As I stated at the meeting, the voter comments regarding the bond on Facebook were very clear; therefore, I make the strong recommendation that we seek no further feedback, but instead send a warm letter from Superintendent Alexa Allman and School Board President, Eric Keller, thanking the community for their support. The letter will acknowledge we have more homework to do



Deer Park
SCHOOL DISTRICT

before returning to the voters. I have "ghost-written" that letter, and it is enclosed. It's short and sweet.

I have highlighted many aspects in my assessment as to why our recent bond did not pass. When we make positive impacts to reducing negative public comments while developing the next bond, some of the "no" voters will change their mind. I also feel that of the 66% voters who chose not vote may feel the next bond effort is worth their support and vote, "yes." To get to 60%, we needed 417 more yes votes. Until the next bond in November 2024, this is a number our efforts should be working towards.

With regards,
Gerald F. Ashby
Deer Park School Board Director, #4



Deer Park
SCHOOL DISTRICT

Xx March 2024

Deer Park School District
N. 428 Main
Deer Park, Washington 99006

Dear Deer Park School District Community,

We want to graciously thank our entire community for supporting the 13 February 2024 special elections for Proposition #1 (Levy) and Proposition #2 (Bond). While we are grateful the levy passed, the bond did not. We are taking the community's feedback on the bond leading up to the election to heart, and our teams intend to address all facets of the concerns brought forward in public forums.

With warm regards,
Alexa Allman
Deer Park Superintendent

Eric Keller
Deer Park School Board, President

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