

Letter to the Editor

Discussion on Arthur Unit 305 financing of school repair and expansion project

For the folks that have not visited or understood what was presented on the school web page, this discussion is meant to be informational. All votes are important for or against. It is everyone's sacred right in America. This school expansion is the largest, in terms of dollars, school proposal in any of the adjacent counties ever. Dist. 305 is made up of only small towns that often struggle to survive, especially in an inflationary time where negative GDP threatens every pocket-book. This gives this bond issue extra importance. It takes only one vote to make this school expansion, the law in District 305. For all the people that voted no or did not vote, they now will have a huge new tax burden for twenty plus years. This tax is in addition to the regular property tax. Which is about half school tax. These taxes must be paid before all other expenses: mortgages, family living expenses, emergencies, or loss of income etc. The risk, a sheriff's sale in five years. Property tax is a flat tax, unaffected by income. When assessed it becomes the first lien on your property until the bond is retired in 20 years. This bond issue should not be taken lightly. We all know the feeling after buying a new car and you receive the payment coupons, all seventy-two of them. The school debt coupon book will have 360 monthly payments. It will control your finances until the bonds are called.

For a successful outcome, the voter needs to be as knowledgeable as possible. That takes effort and time and correct information. Voters in Unit Dist. 305 have demonstrated a desire for this information. The problem was the needed input was not easily obtained. People begged the newspaper to print just something. It was buried in the school web site. The survey flyer states the district wants to understand the disconnect between the proposal and the voters. There was never a true connection in the first place. There never was an outcry from the public for a massively expensive project. It appears the expansion took life with a new administration years ago and the appointment of a select committee that was mostly connected to the school. In retrospect it might have been wiser to put in a larger cross section of successful experienced business leaders that know the area. Putting people around oneself that think alike denies you a broader understanding.

Mailers were promotional instead of informational directing you to the school web site. Many good people are not comfortable with computers and smartphones

have limited value on large complex web sites. Professionals like to use words that confound folks. Totally avoiding the newspapers was not a smart move. Lack of graphics or narratives told the folks in the district they did not really matter. It almost felt like the public was not supposed to see the facts. Most people will not buy without seeing a picture first. If this were not true, the Sears catalog would have been only ¼ inch thick. Whoever decided to cut out the Amish community by not approaching them or sending that community information of a pending public school referendum that was going to affect them hugely, shows total lack of understanding of this large, prosperous, and unique people who came here when this was still a swamp. Their community has survived over 600 years through the harshest of times any people has ever known. They are secure by nature, and do not take government revenues or welfare. They take care of their own. They are also in the business of educating their youth at their expense. The Arthur area has 24 parochial schools plus Arthur Christian School. They are all run without public funds. As a community they give much and take nothing. Dist. 305 planners should take note of this. Virtually all industries, largest to smallest shops have their roots deeply planted in the Amish & Mennonite Community. They are a huge part of the tax base in the district. Unit 305 officials take note: they do have a mailbox; it sits on a post next to the road in front of their homes and industries. It will never give you a mailbox full message. To put it simply, the Amish fund their children's education without taxpayer monies and Unit 305 Dist. includes Amish held property to fund its school system. It is a disservice at the minimum to ignore them. An Amish farmer or industry opens a tax notice that states he now has a new school tax that was knowingly hidden from him, the cost \$20,000 on an unimproved 80 acres. That is pure disrespect for an important part of Dist. 305. Many of the rest of the taxpayers that are unconcerned will also get this surprise levee on their homes.

The plan as presented on the school web site (SWS) and the Construction timeline (TL) requires one to have some understanding of construction, bonds as related to financing public works, timelines, who controls the project, makes the construction decisions and how the money is spent. All the taxpayer is asked to do is to place \$30.6 million of his money in the pot and

stand back. It takes a lot of faith in the people who control your tax dollars to do this. The only thing you can do is now stand by and pray everything goes well. I do not recall, in my lifetime, the government ever delivering what they say, and not having large cost overruns. The (TL) allows for construction to last beyond 11 years. Much can go wrong in this amount of time. The school board approved 7-0 to the Phase 1 part of the plan. With this change, the Arthur Grade school would be moved to the Phase 2 project. The state of Illinois reports that in 2022 school construction costs were up 14% and project 5% annual increases from here forward. A trip to the grocery store would easily confirm that. The tax calculator on (SWS) provided for the taxpayer is deceptive at best. The calculator taxes for a resident are for **phase 1 only** \$30.6 million. The rate is .85 cents/per \$100. A \$250k market value home's annual increase is \$708 on top of regular school tax. Phase 2 nearly doubles this tax. This leaves you with a total additional tax liability on your home of \$28,320.00 over the life of the bond. The calculator for farmland is equally deceptive. The EVA cost is outdated by several years and is only a TWP average. Much of

the land in Lowe TWP has a much higher EVA value. The designer of this calculator blocks your ability to enter your EVA. You are forced to use the lower average EVA. An 80-acre farm close to Arthur will have about a \$20,000 assessment without buildings. This calculator is useless if your farm has a higher PI.

The (TL) shows financing by two 20-year bonds callable at maturity. That indicates only interest is paid annually for 20 years. At that time the taxes paid will be returned to the bond holders and you have a new school. The two bonds total \$57.8 million. Remember the first referendum was only authorized to spend \$30.6 million. Will it take a second referendum to authorize the remaining \$27.1 million? Would Dist. 305 find itself in a financial trap with a partially built project needing to go back to referendum to authorize remaining funds? The (SWS) is totally silent on this.

No place on this (SWS) even gives a hint of this cost. No place on the web page predicts engineering, project management, the cost of mobilization, and legal fees, of which there will be a ton. There is nothing said of inflation's impact on future referendums. With all this in mind, I think the project will be way north of what

is being sold. The devil is always found in what is not said.

Here I will add in costs that are not disclosed. (TL) Phase 1 inflation from concept to completion: 3 years inflation, 24% total increase. Phase 1 now becomes \$37.9 million. Inflation will impact Phase 2 more because (TL) projects it to continue past 2033. That is eleven years after concept in 2022. That could see an inflation impact of 55% total increase. That makes Phase 2 \$41.55 million. Phases 1 and 2 now total **\$79.45 million**.

The engineers, architects, and attorneys all need to be paid. They are outside the bid process. They control their own charges for services rendered. **Not a whisper** on the school plan where the funds come from, not even an estimate. Over the 11 years of construction there will be tons of services required especially when much of the project is remodeling. Many of us know how that goes from experience. All kinds of unanticipated problems can arise. I will use the cost of 30% of the project. Could even be higher. Total for this is **\$23.8 million**. That comes to an estimated project cost of **\$103.25 million**.

Nowhere on the web site could I find the total cost of financing

Dist. 305 is **\$216.82 million**. Not the \$30.6 million the school has been selling folks in this Dist. 305. Can the proposed \$1.70 per hundred of assessed value, as stated on official school web page, pay this debt without much higher taxes?

Check my math and tell me where I am wrong. The last referendum appeared to be a vote to authorize the phase 1 money as no engineering will be done until after a successful vote. The ballot initiative stated a repair and update in the district and expansion, no mention of a new high school. Study the plan carefully as it needs a lot of understanding about public work projects to interpret it properly.

Respectfully,
Bill Crane



On Tuesday, January 24 the ALAH sixth grade volleyball team played the ALAH 7B team in a volleyball match prior to the jr. high matches with Cerro Gordo Bement. The sixth grade girls posed with the seventh grade team before their games. Front row: Abby Durbin, Gwendolyn Herring, Abby Franklin, Zoey Mendoza, Macelyn Boddy, Payton Tinkle, Kyndrie Carter, Laila Sanchez, Katherine Palma Rose. Second row: Layla Beck, Annie Ponder, Norma Mendoza, Alana Perez, Annabelle Vanausdoll, Alyssa Davis, Ava Moody, Lilly Evans and Sophia Moore. Back row, left to right: Keely Simpson, Ella Oye, Rylie Ward, Emily Keagle, Addison Dixon, Lyla Sutton, Claire Sass, Bella Romine, and Lacey Rahn.



ALAH 7TH GRADE VOLLEYBALL KNIGHTS. Pictured are the ALAH 2023 seventh grade volleyball team members: Front row, left to right: Layla Beck, Annie Ponder, Norma Mendoza, Alana Perez, Annabelle Vanausdoll, Alyssa Davis, Ava Moody, Lilly Evans and Sophia Moore. Back row, left to right: Keely Simpson, Ella Oye, Rylie Ward, Emily Keagle, Addison Dixon, Lyla Sutton, Claire Sass, Bella Romine, and Lacey Rahn.



ALAH 8TH GRADE VOLLEYBALL KNIGHTS. Pictured here are the ALAH 2023 eighth grade volleyball team members: Front row: Alyssa Ahrendt, Makayla Hays, Sophie Monts, Morgan Casteel, Jorja Lebetter, Riley Strode. Back row: Kaley Herschberger, Reece Oyd, Leighton Poulos, Jaidyn Edwards, Kenna Blaudow, Brynlee Moore, Maleyna Vanausdoll, Isabel Melton.

ALAH Knights Sports Scoreboard

Girls Varsity Basketball

Mac Condill, Head Coach

January 28

ALAH 50

Central A&M 29

Scoring for ALAH: Claire Seal 21, Kailee Otto 10, Charley Condill 9, Kaci Beachy 6, Jewelyonna Hutchcraft 2, Alayna Plank 1, and Addi Yeakel 1

January 26

ALAH 52

Cerro Gordo-Bement 66
Scoring: Claire Seal 19, Kailee Otto 18, Charley Condill 13, and Kaci Beachy 2

January 23

ALAH 45

Okaw Valley 30

Scoring for ALAH: Kailee Otto 19, Claire Seal 14, Kailee Otto 9, Charley Condill 5, Kaci Beachy 4, and Sara Herschberger 3

Next Games: February 6 @ Arcola and February 9 @ home vs. Cumberland

Boys Varsity Basketball

Brad McGill, Head Coach

LPC Tournament January

20-28 @ Argenta-Oreana

January 27

ALAH 74

Argenta-Oreana 82

Scoring: Wyatt Hilligoss 31, Jayce Parsons 21, Connor Nettles 10, Clay Seal 4, Will Hilligoss 3, Nathaniel Hale 3, and Colin Smith 2

January 24

ALAH

Tri-County

Scoring for ALAH: Jayce Parsons 21, Wyatt Hilligoss 15, Connor Nettles 10, Nathaniel Hale 6, Clay Seal 6, Maddix Stirrett 5, Colin Smith 3, Easton Frederick 2, and Will Hilligoss 1

Next Games: February 3 @ home vs. Cerro Gordo-Bement, February 7 @ Tri-County, February 14 @ Arcola, and February 16 @ home vs. Cumberland

ACS Conquering Riders Sports Scoreboard

Girls Varsity Basketball

Nik Kauffman, Head Coach

January 23

ACS 35

Calvary Christian Academy 19
Scoring: Addi Erwin 15 points and Jodi Kuhns 11 points

Next Games: February 9 @ Sangamon Valley, February 16-18 ACSI MidAmerica Tournament @ TBD

Boys Varsity Basketball

Greg Mast, Head Coach

January 27

ACS 70

Uni-High 32

James Lee 22 (career high) and Kyson Pflum 17 points and 10 rebounds

January 24

ACS 66

Tuscola 80

Scoring: James Lee 14, Jaden Mast 14, Kyson Pflum 11 and 4 assists

Next Games: February 3 @ Arcola, February 4 @ La Salette, February 7 @ Greenview, and February 11-16 ECIC Conference Tournament @ Bloomington-Normal