

August 15, 2019 - Wasatch County School District Board of Education Public Hearing (Thursday, August 15, 2019)

A. Call To Order

Procedural: 1. Roll Call of Members

All Board Members Present

Blaik Baird, Mark Davis, Tom Hansen, Cory Holmes, Tyler Bluth

Superintendent Paul Sweat

Business Administrator Keith Johansen

Procedural: 2. Pledge of Allegiance

Board Member Holmes

B. Truth in Taxation Hearing

Action, Discussion, Information: 1. Public Hearing

Information Videos Presented

Public Comment Invited (two minutes per comment, state name and address)

Chris Crittendon - Thanks to Tom Hansen. The tax increase will go to teacher raises and land acquisition. I agree that we should buy land now. Not propose just a new high school but expanding on to the new high school, which would cost less.

Teresa Pugmire, 177 E 2060 S. - I have one of the best jobs on the planet. Thank you to the board and the district for supporting teachers, you are doing what is right for the kids.

Doug Hronick, Lake Creek Farms - Resident for 15 years. 2 of my sons graduated from WHS. I appreciate the videos but don't buy it. My taxes that go into the district have gone up 52%. I had a \$247 increase in 2017-18. This year I had a \$479 increase in property taxes. We are broadening our tax pool, but they just keep getting deeper into our pockets. I need more of an explanation.

Shelia Johnston, Middle School Educator - These are hard times. Extraordinary times calls for extraordinary measures. I have a class of 39, 4 with special needs. Its hard to support our families on a teacher income. It is harder to be a teacher now than it was 10 years ago. We are at the bottom of the states for per pupil finding and teacher salaries. Thank you for your respect for teachers and for the raise.

Matt Sproul, 350 E 400 S - I teach at WHS for 5 years. I work in Wasatch County and I live in a community that cares about education. I want to say thanks and I feel supported.

Tom Hansen - I would respond to Chris' comment. I appreciate him communicating with me. As a board we are extremely reactionary to growth situations. The only proactive thing we can do is purchase sites for future schools, we rely on bond money to do that. We are going to need more elementary schools sooner than a secondary school, we like to keep elementary schools in neighborhoods. I would also welcome, for those that need more explanation, to come meet with us. We have done that often with members of the community. Your perspective is important to us.

Blaik Baird - With the growth we have seen our tax rates go down with the debt service. I actually saw a decrease in my taxes from last year because I didn't have my home reassessed. We don't have control over the homes that were reassessed. As Tom said, we are happy to meet with community members.

Cody Clyde, 999 S 960 E - I can only imagine that raising taxes in the community is one of the most difficult decisions a school board has to make. An average home in the community is close to a half a million dollars. Thank you for doing the hard work and for asking people to pay more. I don't like to pay more taxes, but I do appreciate your support.

Kelly Webb, 1110 S 2400 E. - I care about education. I am 65 and on a fixed income. \$300 is a lot to me. Besides just property owners taking the hit, can another tax or impact fee be put in place by those moving in or developing.

Mark Davis - I would like to answer that - We are not allowed to do any sort of impact fee or tax on anyone moving it. It is against the state law. We are doing everything we can within the law. We can't make the county do anything.

Paul Sweat - There is a movement where the SBA and Supt Associations have lobbied with legislatures talking about impact

fees for schools. We are in favor of something like that. We will work hard with our legislatures to make sure that proposal is heard.

Tom Hansen - IF you talk to your city council they have big decisions to make. One is annexing property for developers into the city boundaries. The city council can give developers options, one that can happen is for a developer to donate property. It would be similar to an impact fee to help relieve the tax burden.

Blaik Baird - The state legislature did an equalization of property taxes. Some of our taxes go out of county because there was no consideration of the cost of living. We need to speak with our legislators about this. It is not fair.

Paul. It is done through the basic rate for counties that feel like they are in a disadvantaged position. We have lobbied and asked our representative to help us. The more we as a community can talk to our legislatures that we don't want our tax dollars leaving our county.

William Klopp, 35 Poll Drive - I believe in teachers getting paid a decent wage is good. I would encourage you to do more proactive communication and to educate us on what is going to building, schools and teachers. When we understand where it is going you will have a more empathetic audience.

Nathan Shepard. 1131 E 1440 S. - I work at Midway Elementary, I also had an offer to work in Nevada, where the cost of living was lower and the salary was higher. The healthcare was more generous here - that decision to move here proved to be fortuitous for my family. My son was diagnosed with cancer four years ago. It was very reassuring to know that the healthcare was included in the benefits package. He was able to get high quality and affordable early education, and was in the first wave of all day kindergarten. Thank you for supporting myself and my family.

Marion Allen, 2155 S 500 E - Please raise your hand if you are associated with the district. This discussion is not about the teacher raise. We all benefit by having good teachers. Where is the remaining percent of the money going if not to teachers? Devices? I have issues with that. How much of it is going to administrative salaries? Other school sites to be purchased? What about the Sorenson Annexation? Did you turn it down? Is the new site in a flood zone where we are going to pay for more flood insurance? Are you going to realign schools to handle the growth? 9th grade to Middle Schools before we need another high school. Are we being fiscally responsible? If a developer donates 70 acres, we turn them down? I have a problem with that. Teachers, we support you.

Blaik Baird - We have not turned down 70- acres from the Sorenson development. We are just not using it at this time. It is available to us and we will use it at some point. It is not geographically the best place to put a high school at this time.

Tom Hansen - We have not turned down any sites that we have received from developers.

Tyler Bluth - We haven't turned down any sites and nor will we. That is the advantage of dealing with developers to get the donation.

Blaik Baird - It still needs to make sense for our students and do what is the best thing for safety. As far as the flood zone. We have some information about that we would like to share.

Mark Davis - We have extensively analyzed Midway School and what it will cost to keep it open. The information that we have is overwhelming to build a new school. Midway is growing. We would be putting more money into the existing school, we feel like it is a good time to do this.

Tom Hansen - Families have come to me asking not to break up the neighborhood. The elementary school was built for 300 students, there are nearly 800 there. I feel really proud that we have designed a solution to keep the neighborhood together by building a new school large enough to house all the families. Midway wants an elementary school to house all of their kids. Its difficult to find affordable land in Midway. We negotiated \$1 a year to be able to keep our students in the existing school while construction is happening.

Mark Davis - That deal is a land swap.

Paul Sweat - There is room for growth in the Middle Schools for years. It is a short term solution to move our 9th graders to Middle School. We philosophically agree that a 4-year-high school model is best for students. We don't foresee building another Middle school anytime soon. In 2009, we moved into the HS for 1300 students, we are going to open this school year with 2300 students. These decisions are made with planning and thoughtfulness by the board. We have not turned down any sites. The Sorenson property is on a slope and has tough soils to deal with. 45% is 100% in the capital budget to purchase future school sites. We are nervous. The growth here is out of control. We don't build schools then wait for them to fill up. No one wants their taxes raised.

Tyler Bluth - The tax burden on the businesses is difficult for small businesses too.

Blaik Baird - that is the reason why we've raised the capital levy here so that we can build that fund and be proactive in identifying and purchasing future school sites, whether it be elementary or middle school or another high school that will come to this valley besides the one that we're trying to pass. We just see the growth. Everybody sees it. And it's just a matter of time.

Rachel Kahler - We cannot shut the gate, we cannot deny private property owners the opportunity to sell their land. We can work better with developers that are already coming. We as a community need to work together to grow this community together. There are 5000 homes coming to the Sorenson property. We are responsible for educating them. We are not doing enough to ask the developers to donate land.

Tyler Bluth - These policies have been set. It is how we have to deal with and manage the growth. We are aware of the number of students in schools.

Melissa Brown, 2330 S 400 E - I am a teacher at WHS Alternative. Thank you for the raise. I moved here 5 years ago. This is the best district in the nation!

Barb Walton - I am here tonight to recognize the classified employees. I am grateful for the raise and benefits.

Carolee Martinez, 19 E 5 S. I have lived in the valley for 38 years. As a taxpayer, I want the best for my grandchildren. If I have to sacrifice I will. I am willing to do whatever to make sure the future of these kids have what they need.

Merry Duggin - 260 E , Daniel - After the tentative budge was passed in a June public meeting the salaries and packages were approved. I understand everything that was explained on the certified tax rate. My property taxes went up over \$4000. We need to spread the pain. I advocate for impact fee. Many people will need to make sacrifices because of taxes. 84 million dollar budget, we over spent by 3 million dollars - that is a trend. Lets get some responsibility in our budgets.

Brian Thorne - I appreciate the comments about supporting teachers. Supporting the working conditions of teachers is important as well. We have 5 classrooms in portables. Julie Flack has an office in a closet. We had a lockdown this year, it was impactful. It was scary to think about what was going on in those portables during those times. I want my kids to have the best. I don't want my kids to go to a 6A school. I appreciate our board doing right by kids and teachers.

Coach Coburn - I don't want to coach at a 6A school. I have been teaching for 30 years. Thank you to the school board and for what you have done for educators.

Jerry Owens, 70 N Johnson Rd. - Raising taxes over 83%. Midway took my land and didn't pay me one penny.

Cory Holmes - We look forward to being better partners with the city and counties. We had a strained relationship for a while. We can all be better and committed to serving and doing more.

Tera Jarvi - This is the best district ever because of our leadership.

Tracy Taylor, 451 N 1300 E - I was a PTA mom for 17 years. August 20th is the bond vote. The capital fund that you are funding 45% doesn't really have a lot of over site. The money gets to be used however you see fit. The location for the land that the school board chose has some issues. It is in a flood zone. The Wasatch Taxpayers Association GRAMA requested how much is in the capital fund and there is over 6 million dollars. Im concerned about the pattern of conduct in the past and the board purchasing land without appraisals, or doing proper due diligence on their land in Daniel on 3000 South. The Sorenson property is next to the UVU campus and students are already going there. That is a logical place to put a high school. I would like to see equitable taxing throughout everyone in the county. Some board members haven't been assessed in the last 5 years. They should check their own assessments.

Mark Davis - I'd like to make a couple comments about us not being reassessed. That has nothing to do with us. We are not the county assessor. I don't know if I've ever spoke to the county assessor. That is not my role. That is not our role. A couple of things that I want to make a comment on; Your website advertises our current capital debt compared to others in the state per capital and per student costs. A spreadsheet on your website shows Wasatch Dept at 23 percent, Morgan 28, Duchesne 25, Beaver 24, Cash 24 Juab 25, Nebo 24 - showing Wasatch at 9. You put a slant on everything and there are inaccuracies everywhere. Based on your analysis of Morgan and Nebo. They have a tax base on this spreadsheet of one hundred and thirty-seven thousand seven hundred and forty-four tax or population much larger than we have yet. Their debt is 24 percent, which is higher than ours. And so with your analysis, we will go down to Nebo and expect to see elaborate schools because their debt is tied to their schools, is tied to what they built based on your analysis. And so if we look one step deeper. Nebo Since 2008, Nebos Maple Mountain High School 2009, Brand New Salem Hills 2008 - brand new. Last year, 298 million dollar bond with 47 million coming from their capital fund to go towards the building of more schools and additional projects. So Nebo is higher than us because of the growth that they have received and because of the timing of their debt. Morgan If you look at Morgan New Mountain Growing Middle School that opens this year. The high school addition is slated to open this year. Their tax base and population is only 11000. The timing of their debt is new. Which brings up the percentage of state student to debt ratio higher. Wasatch county school district building a new high school in 2009. We build a new middle school, a new pool and a new elementary. Since then, our debt is newer and so naturally our debt is going to be higher. The association saying that our schools, our needs or wants - instead of a need is inaccurate. Your analysis, your posts, everything has been on that slant. We are building to elaborate... It's not accurate. The very information that you have on your website is false. It shows the faults of your analysis. If you are going to be the fiscal hawks of Wasatch County, I would expect personally some fiscal abilities.

Tom Hansen - it's really important as we participate in these community meetings to try to be transparent and fair. Today we have a presentation from your association and your mission is to promote fair transparency and impartial information consistently going through and saying the last high school cost 80 million dollars.

What you report is inaccurate - the last high school cost sixty-nine million dollars. So that's one case in point. A second case in point is recently you posted three videos of the inner local meeting. So your comments about what occurred at that meeting are unfair, non-transparent, impartial. For example, Paul Sweat says how visitors from around the country come to our school district. That's a fact. Your slant seems like our school district is Spain, our taxpayer dollar to lift the wrecked reputation. Question mark that is putting words into the superintendents mouth, that is slanting that other school districts across other school districts across the state, across the country that want to come off, see what we do, because we have great teachers and great facilities. They come to get best practices. No way, shape or form do we at any point try to increase the reputation of our district by spending taxpayer dollar. That's untrue. It's unfair. It's non-transparent and it's extremely partial. Second case in point, superintendent at that meeting says he goes to breakfast with county managers to foster a relationship of trust. Then you go on and say, not sure the taxpayers want three bureaucrats deciding the future and not discussing with elected officials. It's not true. He did not insinuate for one second that he was going to breakfast with them to base their conversation on future decisions. It was slander and it was not appropriate. It put words in his mouth. You put us in a corner by making things up that aren't true.

And then you represent yourself as a tax payer association. We asked specifically, what makes up that membership? The Taxpayer Association? We weren't able to get that information. You have a treasurer. You charge 100 dollars per membership. I would love to see what the Taxpayer Association membership consists of. Because if I were to pool everybody in this room, I assume they would raise their hand if they were a taxpayer. So how many of them are a part of your association? How were you elected to the chair? And where do you give them the opportunity for you to be their voice? There are 30000 members of this community that voted the five of us onto these boards. I would say we represent the taxpayer just as much as you do. The PTA is a membership of 1000. They each pay six dollars for their membership. You question at our meeting today, what committees do we have? We have the community council. It's run by teachers and principals and community members. The PTA parents. We have a safety committee that we get together with all the different entities and talk about our school district. We have a focus groups. We have town halls. We feel very strongly that we have a pulse on what's going on in the community above and beyond association, whom we're not really sure represents how many members. And time and time again you come in and give your self-serving comments to make us out as were the bad guys, not only us, but anybody else that tries to handle the growth in this community, whether it's the sewer, the power, the police, the firemen.

Growth comes with the consequence, the schools. You attack them to make them feel like they're the scapegoat for what occurs with being in the fastest growing community in the country. And so the last thing that I think is really inaccurate is there are times when you in your group say that the test scores or the sage scores or the graduating percentages doesn't justify building new schools. And so where does that put us? That's not true. We have great scores. We have improving stage scores. We have high graduation rates. To say that that is contingent on us being able to provide an environment where people succeed is once again unfair, non-transparent and extremely partial. We have 1000 employees. We are the largest employer in the community. We have a responsibility to take care of those employees. And what we're doing tonight is that it's a hard decision. I'm a taxpayer. My parents and my in-laws are there on fixed incomes. They're retired. What we're doing takes extreme leadership and long term strategy that there are not that many people that are elected officials or officials that are willing to take. We're not taking the easy route. We're taking the best rap. It's always with us. Teachers and students. First, fiscal responsibility. Always

Mark Davis - I have one more comment. I think the Taxpayers Association could be a great advocate. This is why I have an issue working with the Taxpayers Association. In 2018, the truth and taxation meeting that was posted on your Website. "Here's our analysis of the most recent budget as compared to past years and highlighting some fiscal concerns within our school district. In past years, the citizens have approved the 62 million dollar bond and the most expensive high school in the state. 80 million at the time it was being constructed in 2006 through 2009. Within 10 years, this high school that was touted to last us 50 years is now too small. Nothing that the school district did to bring people in. And then this year on your Facebook account. How about a wing of classrooms added to the current high school? The school board said of the school last us decades. It only it didn't even last six years." So we have it's 10 years in six years for someone who isn't fiscal hawk and representing as the chair of the Taxpayers Association. When newcomers come in and look at the Taxpayers Association and look and say the taxpayer chair said that this school hasn't even been there for six years, and then the district is saying it was built in 2009. Again, slanted 2008 budget comment, public relations up six hundred and sixty seven percent, pool electricity cost triples, school nurse budget doubles.

How many school nurses do we have? One and a half. Electricity cost triples. It's about three times the size of the last pool.

Then your comment underneath that the chance of passing chance of budget passing the board. After a little truth, but abundant taxation. One hundred percent. And so will the midyear adjustment increase without even talking to the board members. I have never had a discussion with you about education. I don't believe you've come to any of us and had a discussion or asked us questions, but over and over again we are thrown under the bus by your comments, which You insinuate that this is how other school districts do it, to make my point here, South Summit School District responding to the will of the public later. Both school districts within 15 minutes of us. Here's number two. Park City wants public input. Our master plan. This is great. The public should weigh in. We should listen to the public. And we do. We've demonstrated that something is strict interesting with these comments is that we should act like these other districts within 15 minutes of us. Here's another comment you make. I doubt there are any school board members on this thread. So unless you take to their Facebook page or TAC school board members directly, they will not see your comments. Just saying the school board actually hired a social media and PR person - so they don't have to respond to us or see our comments. We as taxpayers actually pay someone to keep the school board at arm's length from the taxpayers and parents. Let that sink in. Here's their page. No mention of this expenditure. So I have a question. These other two school districts are within 15 minutes of us. Do they have

a PR director? Park City School District. They have Melinda Colton has spent the last 26 years working in public relations and hired in higher and public education. She was named the director of communications for Park City School District in August 2017. So under implication, the Park City School Board hired somebody to keep them at arm's length as well. Five days ago, community outreach liaison. Park City School District responsibilities to coordinate communications and inform between the school, home and community. Facilitate home and community understanding of school programs and objectives. Facilitate parent involvement in school activities. I will let you ask our PR director if she is hired to keep us at arm's length. I take that as a slap in the face. I put in so many hours to make the right decision without you even talking to me. You repeatedly throw me under the bus. I don't support the Taxpayers Association because of your behavior.

Tracy Taylor - I hope you give me half as much time to defend myself. Unfortunately, this is what happens when somebody in a whole organization is looking into the finances of this school district. We grandma request documents. We record meetings. We do that. We are the only organization in this county that does it for all entities, not just you guys, which we GRAMA request a budget every year. That's a full unabridged budget. And the first time we did that six years ago, the superintendent at the time denied us. We just barely started our organization. We were denied as a taxpayer's association to get a full budget from this school district.

We had to bring the GRAMA to the omnsbudsmen from the state of Utah to sit with us. It took us forty five minutes for them to actually admit they had a budget on their computer because the moment they were going to admit that they would have to give it to us by law. Im sure it's not convenient for you guys, but unfortunately, that's the only place we can get some of this information. We had to go to the state records' committee a couple times because you denied us this public information. So we asked for e-mails. You charge an exorbitant amount of money to get the e-mails from your organization, even though you've just spent twenty-five thousand or twenty-seven thousand, I believe, on software to be able to read all these emails. You are charging us thousands of dollars to get a hold of these emails. We had to take you to the state records' committee for that. The last time we had to was for your Superintendent hire. I'm sorry, but Superintendent Paul Sweat's hiring process and at that time, anybody can go listen to that on our Web site. We had a GRAMA attorney in the state of Utah tell us that he will do it pro-bono for us because he couldn't believe the process that was done to hire the superintendent. They quoted as saying this is a colossal transparency failure. So we've had to go to the state officials. provide analysis, if you would read that page carefully. It says we will be the highest debt per capita of any school district in the state of Utah. That means for every taxpayer who pays these bills. As you guys know, we have about 34000 people in our county, half of which are kids. So we're looking at 15000 people paying for all these schools.

And we at the Taxpayers Association was concerned about that. And we actually asked for a state official to do that analysis that you are criticizing right now. We did not do that analysis. Somebody at the state sent it to us. So if you're criticizing that analysis, you're not criticizing us. You need to start talking to the state official who did it. But my point is these documents are done by people who know this so much better than us. We had to GRAMA request your own budget. We have citizens, volunteer citizens and analyze your budgets. That's hard to do.

I feel the need to defend myself and our organization after this display was one of yours or ours. Anybody who criticizes or looks into or tries to analyze the amount of money. Ninety two million dollar a year budget that is so beyond any other budget in the county. This is what happens. But do you think this isn't for everybody else who has questions about the budget or questions about how much a One hundred and thirty two million dollars for a high school, really? No one is going to come have any questions because of this display.

Additional Public remarks.

C. Adjournment

Procedural: 1. Adjourn Meeting