

EasyReader

Letters, Part II

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J is for jym

Dear ER:

Being a Hermosa Beach resident for almost 45 years and a property owner, I wanted to clarify points not mentioned in school board president Lance Widman's letter to the editor ("Can't teach old dogs new tricks," ER Dec. 22, 2005).

When the public vote regarding school bond Measure J came on the ballot in 2002, I contacted the City Manager of Hermosa Beach Steve Burrell in order to pull the contract between the School District and the City regarding the sale of Pier Avenue School to see why re-opening the school was not being considered an alternative to the bond.

There were no prior requests to see the contract, so it was a surprise to the City Manager and myself to find that the sale of Pier Avenue School to the City of Hermosa Beach was for less than fair market value. In exchange for the loss of income to the School District, a clause in the sales contract gave the Hermosa School District the right to use the school facilities for free for the next 50.. One of the signatures on that contract of sale was Mayor of Hermosa Beach Lance Widman.

Unfortunately, the vote on Measure J occurred before this information could be released to the public.

It's also no wonder that Widman's request from the School District's highly paid architect, Dougherty and Dougherty, to determine the validity of re-opening Pier Avenue came back negative. This is same architecture firm that gave the district a \$30,000 donation to help promote the bond and the same firm that has already received \$2 million of the bond money to design the gym.

The renovation of the existing Pier Avenue School facility would be a tenth the cost to build new facilities, a fact I discovered in July of 2003, after bringing in an independent seismic engineer to inquiry into the structural soundness of the existing School buildings.

The seismic engineer investigation determined the buildings to be poured in place concrete, built by the WPA in 1939. Together with an additional inquiry by the State Architect (DSA), I determined that there are no requirements for seismic upgrades of school buildings. A study would be required to determine if any structural changes have occurred while the campus was being used as a public facility would need to be conducted.

I have spoken at numerous school board meetings regarding these independent findings, with the possibility that the public may have been misled from considering the re-opening of Pier Avenue School as a way of selling Measure J.

In conclusion, the biggest fact of all is the measure as it read on the ballot on November 11, 2002:

Measure J. School Improvement Bond Measure -- Hermosa Beach City Elementary School

District (General Obligation Bond Measure - To improve the quality of education, shall the Hermosa Beach City School District be authorized to finance classroom modernization; upgrade electrical systems to improve access to technology; make health, safety, and security improvements; upgrade plumbing, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems; construct classrooms and science labs; acquire property, and qualify for State funds up to \$1,700,000, by issuing 13,600,000 in bonds, within maximum legal interest rates, with annual audits, and citizens' oversight committee and no money for administrators' salaries? Yes or No.
Not once does the word gymnasium appear on the ballot. It is the right of the California voter to be protected by law, not for the School Board to interpret its agenda and read between the lines.

Chris Miller
Hermosa Beach

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