

## **COLUMN: Details for the Brownsboro School just don't add up**

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The "small group of people" referenced by the superintendent likely includes us. And it's true that a relative few of us have had time to research the many facts uncovered through open records requests.

At the November Town Hall meeting, attended by roughly 100 residents from all over the county, and numerous public officials, not one spoke in favor of the Brownsboro school, while many expressed unfavorable views on the location and need for this proposed campus.

The superintendent claims discussion of the purchase of 95 acres for a Brownsboro campus is surrounded by misinformation, and we'd have to agree. Unfortunately, the state auditor's report is based upon an assumption that the property is classified as commercial. The property has always been zoned for residential use (R-2) and classified as agricultural for tax purposes.

The auditor identified prior business relationships between a board member and the "realtor/developer" and further recommended that KDE adopt a provision requiring certification that a board member "has no conflict of interest with any property owner, vendor, or subcontractor involved in the acquisition."

Not only did the "realtor/developer" retain 10 choice acres adjacent to the proposed entrance road, but also negotiated easement rights for roads and sewer lines.

Why is this important? Because the proposed use for this property (according to a traffic study paid for by the BOE) was a 50-unit condo site that would require sewer service and a zoning change. Currently, the closest sewer service is a half-mile away. In addition, the realtor/developer's family owns large chunks of possible development land with an entrance access just across the road from the proposed school site on Ky. 1817 about a mile from existing sewer service. Proposed road improvements on Ky. 329 and Ky. 1817 along with sewers and other infrastructure improvements will be key to future development of those properties.

Mr. Upchurch maintains that the KDE spent six months reviewing information required to approve the purchase and listed many requirements, but approval by KDE took only one day and the BOE approval and closing occurred three days later.

The Transportation Cabinet's letter was submitted the day after approval from KDE and stated in part, that the construction of more than one school on the property would require major widening of Ky. 329 and that "the cabinet does not have sufficient funding to undertake that widening in the near future." The board never submitted a required comparative site analysis, justification and certification and omitted the required PVA assessed value of \$9,700 per acre.

The superintendent's rationale for the Brownsboro land purchase is questionable.

After studying the OCBE's Verstrans Map showing the location of all elementary school families, there are only 16 such families within a two-mile radius of the proposed school location.

Why would the schools not utilize the school capacity ordinance that was designed to actually build schools where development is planned?

In Crestwood, there are three elementary schools with current available capacity of 336 students and Brentwood has offered another school site. The Brownsboro Planning Area will continue to grow but at a modest rate because large parcels are controlled in family trusts or conservation easements. That is, unless new schools are built with the added infrastructure to attract development and that is the crux of our complaints – building schools to lead not follow development.

Elementary school enrollment has been in decline for the last three years and BOE projections show further declines for the next two school years. Thus, at the start of the 2014-15 school year when the new Brownsboro school is scheduled to open, total enrollment is projected to be 835 under the current elementary school capacity.

Why spend \$20M for a new elementary school that will initially house 500 students? The projection for Goshen Elementary is a decline to 722 students over the next three years and NOMS is projected to decline to right at capacity of 800 in that same time frame, without moving, closing or changing any schools or students.

Student transportation concerns for Moser Farms and Glen Oaks residents are equally ridiculous. Why would kids from that area be redistricted to a new Liberty school when Harmony is much closer and will have space for 130 students? And the Crestwood schools – closer than Goshen, Harmony or Brownsboro – will be 336 under capacity as mentioned above.

This busing issue is the very reason that the Brownsboro master plan suggested a neighborhood elementary school in the Glen Oaks/Norton Commons area – to place schools where students reside. The need for redistricting to serve North Oldham Middle School is also misplaced. As stated above the projected enrollment at NOMS is expected to decline to 801 over the next three years, right at capacity, with no redistricting.

In fact, due to five straight years of projected elementary declines, total middle school enrollments will start to decline in 2014-15 and not reach capacity again until 2020.

The superintendent's explanation that a decline of 60 students at one middle school would decide if we build another \$30 million school is scary to say the least.

The real problem is finances. During the past seven years, the annual building fund expenditure for debt service has quadrupled from \$3.3 M (2002-03) to \$13.1M (2009-10). The annual payments for long-term debt service are projected to be \$12 million (\$ 6M in interest) for the next 18 years.

This represents 100 percent of local tax revenue in the building fund. Since the board hired Upchurch in 2005, they have acquired more than 250 acres of land at a total cost of about \$11 million, and the only acre they've used includes the board's central office in Crestwood.

In the seven years prior, the only acquisition was 141 acres for the East Oldham campus (\$600K), and 100 acres of that remain undeveloped.

Why, with capacity planning adopted in 2004, is this happening? The answer is simple. The extra "Growth Nickel" tax increase passed in 2003-04. Despite all that extra money the building fund was depleted to virtually zero by the end of last school year.

Upchurch claims the board wasn't included in the Brownsboro master plan process. The February 10, 2009 Study Review Committee of the planning commission approved the incorporation of recommendations from the board of education.

The same recommendations were ultimately included in the final plan. Further, the master plan was intended to be a process whereby the residents (not any governmental agency) had input into the future of their neighborhoods.

It speaks volumes about the arrogance of the superintendent and the BOE that they feel they should have been invited. Brownsboro master plan meetings were regularly announced during planning commission and

fiscal court meetings, which are both regularly attended by school district staff. In addition, there were several public notices and articles written about the plan.

A year and a half after we asked, the superintendent now tells us he'd like to work with the residents of Brownsboro.

Maybe the 8-6 decision by the planning commission to approve the Brownsboro school master plan (a process that state law dictates should begin before site acquisition) and the eight recommendations that came out of that meeting had an affect.

Of course, one of those recommendations was to present justification to fiscal court for public review and comment – a recommendation we believe the superintendent has tried to circumvent by submitting a column to The Era.

From our view, the board of education hasn't convinced fiscal court or the residents of Oldham County that there's adequate justification to proceed with this very expensive project.

The views expressed in this column are those of the writers. To read Superintendent Upchurch's column, click [here](#).