

An Opinion: In Vernonia, We Can Afford New Schools

By Scott Laird

A new school year is starting and the debate about building a new school campus in Vernonia is heating up. One objection I've heard to the construction of a new \$38 million school project is that we can't afford it. The Vernonia school board recently approved a resolution for a school bond that would raise \$13 million towards that construction, a bond which Vernonians will have a chance to approve or reject on the November 3 election ballot.

The school board approved that \$13 million bond with the idea that the balance of the funds will be raised through a capital campaign that will target federal stimulus funds, state funds, and private philanthropic sources. Bond proponents say we have a compelling case to be the recipient of those funds, and they are working hard to line up those sources. In other words, Vernonia could build a new school campus and our residents would only directly pay about one-third of the cost. Which sounds like a pretty good deal any way you slice it.

But first, you and I have to pass that \$13 million school bond. None of those other sources will send money our way if Vernonia doesn't show its own commitment by making a down-payment. \$13 million dollars sounds like a lot of money, especially to this community, especially right now. And that's where this gets a little tricky and some objections are being raised. But let's look at this a little more closely.

When people say we can't afford new schools, what does that mean? The proposed bond would raise property taxes by about \$1.90 per thousand of assessed value. The first year might be a little higher; so, for simplicity's sake, let's round it to \$2 per thousand. That means if your property

is assessed at \$100,000 you would pay \$200 more in property taxes a year. Double it if your property is valued at \$200,000. \$400 a year is \$34 a month. For the next twenty to twenty-five years.

Are new, safe, insurable schools for our children and the continuation of a school system here in Vernonia worth around \$34 a month to you?

For many of us, paying higher property taxes will be a struggle, and making that payment may mean making sacrifices. So the question might be, what are you willing to sacrifice? What are you willing to give up? Are there things that you and I think we need that maybe we don't? Are there small adjustments in our monthly budget we could make that would free up those funds in order to pay for new schools?

I would like to offer some ideas; but before I do, I want to acknowledge that many of us are already on a bare-bones budget, and have already made all the cuts we are capable of. If this is you, your alternatives may be few, including voting no on the school bond. You may also need to consider whether you need to find a more affordable property in this community, where you can afford the new property taxes. You may have some very tough decisions in the next few months.

But for others, we may think we can't afford property tax increases, but haven't really looked at our personal spending choices. My hope is to encourage all of us to do some outside-the-box thinking and consider some alternatives before you decide you can't afford new schools and choose to vote no.

Do you have satellite TV? How much do you pay a month, and for how many channels? Do you buy new DVD's, CD's or pay to download music? Do you buy new or

used books? Does your family have a Netflix membership? One way to save might be to reduce your satellite plan and borrow a TV series or movies. The library is also a great source of inexpensive viewing and reading entertainment. By looking closely at what you spend on this kind of entertainment, you might save \$20 a month. What if you made a small sacrifice and put that money towards a new computer lab at the new school?

Do you receive a weekly subscription to a publication like People, Time or the National Enquirer? Some of these publications cost as much as \$100 per year, some as little as \$26. What if you cut back on one or more of these subscriptions each year, got some of this information online, saved a few dollars each month, and put that money towards a new library for our students?

Here's one we always hear about-- that morning latte. Are you one of those people who likes to get a specialty coffee drink or baked goods in the morning? For me, I like to treat myself to a specialty beer (not in the morning, of course!), which usually costs around \$5 for a 22-oz. bottle. If you eliminated that specialty drink and had a regular cup of coffee twice a week, or if I skipped that beer, we could save \$5 a week, and put that money towards a safe place for students to hang out during their school breaks.

Does your family go out to eat occasionally or get take-out on the weekends? Or do you go out for lunch when at work? Have you recently taken a look at those receipts to see what they add up to in a month? I can easily spend \$30 on dinner out for two people. Lunch could easily cost \$5-\$10, maybe more. Would you consider packing a lunch once or twice a week, or cutting back on a family night out, and putting those savings towards a new cafeteria for our students?

Here's a big one-- your monthly car payment. How much could you save by trading in that newer model for something a little older but still as practical, without giving up too many amenities? \$10, \$20, \$30-- maybe even \$40 a month? What if you traded in that newer model for an older model and eliminated that car payment altogether? You could help pay for new, bright classrooms, science labs and a new shop and art building at the new school campus.

There are plenty of ideas out there about how to save a few dollars here and there. Clip coupons and buy when things are on sale when grocery shopping. Buy some of your clothing second-hand-- a new shirt or blouse might cost \$50; that same shirt second-hand can cost \$7. Entertain at home-- rent movies instead of going to the theater or go to matinees. An evening at the movies can cost a family of four \$60; a rental and homemade popcorn would cost \$4. Invite friends over to your house for dinner instead of going out.

Use credit cards responsibly, and look for good deals on interest rates. Look closely at how and where you keep your savings. Look into consolidating loans and credit accounts. There are favorable interest rates available, both for borrowing money and for saving money.

Reduce how much you spend each year on a family vacation. Reduce (you don't have to eliminate) how much you spend during the holidays on gifts.

Maybe you don't think Vernonia needs new schools. But if you do agree that a safe place to send our students is a priority, but just aren't sure how you would be able to pay your share, it may not be as hard as you think. And, in my opinion, our students and a secure future for our community is worth a little sacrifice.

Readers Lend Their Voices...

To the Editor--

I would like to thank everyone who participated in the Pet Party at First Friday on the first day of Jamboree. Everyone had so much fun making the scarves for their pets and it was so much fun to watch the "dogs bobbin' for dogs"! They had so many different techniques, but large & small alike all got their hot dogs!

Even though we didn't get as many donations as I had wished, Vernonia Cares - Pet Food Division benefitted from your generosity. Watch for this and more at the next First Friday, September 4, where we'll also be having a Pet Parade & Party. This will be another benefit for Vernonia Cares - Pet Food Division. If you would like to make a donation to Vernonia Cares, it is open every Tuesday and Thursday. Donations will be gratefully accepted at those times.

Carol Davis
Vernonia

To the Citizens of Vernonia:

My name is Darrold Mushatt and I grew up here in Vernonia. I graduated from Vernonia High School and then worked different jobs before joining the Army where I served for five years. My wife and I are the parents of two boys and two girls and we live here in Vernonia. We are in need of your support and assistance.

I am 32 years old and have always worked hard. In April of 2007, I started feeling sick. One day I would feel fine and the next I would have no energy and feel sick to my stomach. Tests were done here at the Vernonia Medical Clinic and after taking what seemed to be all of my blood, Dr. Gilmore broke the bad news to me that my kidneys had failed and she already had a room set up for me at Providence Hospital in Portland. My world immediately turned upside down and inside out.

Three surgeries and five days later, catheters were placed in my thigh, chest, and wrist for kidney dialysis. Going back to work was difficult at best as I worked swing shift and would have to coordinate two hour trips for dialysis. I would go in for dialysis from 6:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., then be at work at 3:00 p.m. which made for extremely long days. It was proving to be too costly financially and physically, so my doctor suggested doing dialysis at home. This required another surgery to install a catheter in my abdomen. This worked out well as I could receive the dialysis while sleeping, then disconnect and go to work. This was working fine until I got a bad infection and a hernia. After they fixed both of those problems I got hit with them again. They had to move my catheter to the opposite side and I was told I would have to stop working as it was taking a toll on my system. That was the hardest thing for me to do as I have always worked and didn't want to stop now. I was also required to go back to the center three times a week for dialysis as it is

the only way I can stay alive.

There is a possible more long term solution to my problem. I am a candidate for a kidney transplant and can be added to the transplant list if I can raise at least \$8,000 for costs not covered by insurance. I am required to have the money raised and paid before they will add my name to the kidney transplant list. I have no means to raise the funds as I am unable to work at this time. I am asking for your help and support for this much needed transplant so that my family and I can try to lead a more normal life, or simply to prolong my life with them. An account has been opened at Wauna Federal Credit Union for anyone wishing to donate for my transplant. I am asking for your donations and prayers for me and my family that we will be successful in raising the \$8,000 needed for the transplant. We thank you in advance for your support and prayers. Sincerely, Darrold & Teresa Mushatt

To The Editor:

The Upper Nehalem Watershed Council is seeking volunteers willing to serve on the Board of Directors. Duties include attending regular meetings, helping to create goals, strategies and policies designed to promote watershed health throughout the Upper Nehalem Valley.

In particular we need someone with financial expertise that would be willing to take on the role of Treasurer. The Treasurer's responsibilities would include providing guidance and oversight to the Executive Director and the Bookkeeper.

Any resident of the Nehalem Watershed is welcome. If you are interested in participating please contact Maggie Peyton at 503-429-0869.

To the Editor-

Thanks to all the people who supported Vernonia Cares Food Bank recently. Some enjoyed our Jamboree Breakfast, others bought delicious coated almonds or other nuts through the Stumptown Nuts concession stand and others entered the Bear Creek Run/Walk event. These fundraisers are an important part of keeping the food bank open for over 400 people per month who need grocery assistance. Thanks to all the volunteers who efficiently led these projects (Rosie McCoy, Steve Soma and Leticia Yniguez, and Maria Lemay) and also to all the "worker bees" who manned the events.

Sandy Welch

Director, Vernonia Cares Food Bank

To The Editor-

On the behalf of the Nehalem Valley Speed and Beauty Car Club members, I would like to extend a gracious thank you to all of our entrants, sponsors, friends and families for the success of the 18th Annual Jamboree Cruise in,

August 8th at Vernonia 52nd Annual Friendship Jamboree. This year we had 92 entrants to our show. This show would not be possible with out all of your generous support and participation.

I hope that you all enjoyed the show and had a chance to listen to the band. And of course had time to check out all of those great cars!

A special thank you to all of you that helped at the booster wagon.

This year we had 26 trophies with 3 Ways to Win. Best and First in Class Awards that were voted on by the entrants and calculated by a computer program. Second, we offered 10 Special Awards selected by our Judges and last we offered 4 special hand crafted Awards.

Thank you,
Glenda Delemos
NVSP Car Club

To the Editor:

With so many articles in the papers regarding the rising number of foreclosures in Oregon, I would like to provide some additional information for homeowners. Community Action Team's Housing Center provides foreclosure prevention counseling for homeowners in Clatsop, Tillamook and Columbia Counties. The counseling is FREE to homeowners and assists them with one-on-one counseling to work towards the best possible solution for their specific situation. Community Action Team is a HUD approved counseling agency and has been serving residents in the tri-county area for more than 30 years. If you or someone you know would like to speak with a counselor regarding foreclosure prevention counseling, please call Community Action Team at (503) 325-9215 or (800) 325-8098, or e-mail cindkp@cat-team.org. You can also access www.cat-team.org/nworhc to see other services provided.

Cindy Peake
Northwest Oregon Regional Housing Center Manager
Community Action Team, Inc.
Astoria, OR

Readers Lend Their Voices continued on page 6

HOW TO SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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