

An open letter to the residents of the Fruitport School District

On March 9, 2009, on behalf of the voters and residents of the Fruitport School District, the *Fruitport Area News* submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Fruitport School District asking for information relating to the \$83 million bond proposal to be voted upon by Fruitport School District voters on May 5, 2009. In a letter dated March 13, 2009, Fruitport Schools' Superintendent Nicholas Ceglarek refused to give this newspaper the information that we had requested. In his letter of refusal, Superintendent Ceglarek stated: "The time period for responding to your information request is being extended for an additional ten [10] business days. The extension is to provide adequate time within which to compile documents and review them with respect to our exemptions from disclosure." This is a farce and the superintendent knows it. By delaying the release of this information for an additional 10 business days, this could effectively prevent the release of this information for almost three weeks. And thus we are almost three weeks closer to the bond election without the voters' receiving information they have a right to know. Is this the tactic of the school's administration? Delay! Delay! Delay!

Mr. Ceglarek further states in his letter of refusal that the "...school district will review its records to identify documents which exist containing the release of all information which you seek, and will separate any such release of all information from information which is exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act." In other words, we could wait almost three weeks and then have the school superintendent tell us that we still cannot have the information that we requested. This is totally unacceptable. Mr. Ceglarek knows full well that the information we are seeking is **not** exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. A simple reading of 15.243 section 13 of the Freedom of Information Act: "Items exempt from disclosure," shows that the items we are requesting are not exempt. This is simply a delaying tactic on the part of the superintendent.

The Freedom of Information Act states: "When a public body receives a request for a public record it shall **immediately**, but not more than **five** business days after the day the request is received, unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the person making the request, respond to the request..." The Freedom of Information Act further states: "[a public body may] under **unusual circumstances**, issue a notice extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the public body shall respond to the request."

Please note that the Freedom of Information Act says **UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES!** What is the **unusual circumstance** about asking for a list of the facility study committee members and their affiliation, if any, with the Fruitport School District? What is the **unusual circumstance** about asking for the criteria used to select the facility study committee members and how the facility study committee members were selected and by whom? What is the **unusual circumstance** about asking for a copy of the minutes of the school board meeting where the recommendation of the facility study committee was presented to the school board? What is the **unusual circumstance** about asking for a copy of the minutes of the school board meeting of November 21, 2008? What is the **unusual circumstance** about asking for a copy of the minutes of the school board meeting where the Skillman Corporation, Hooker de Jong, and GMB Associates were hired or asked to assist the Fruitport School District concerning facility and technology improvements? What is the **unusual circumstance** about asking for copies of any school board meeting minutes? The district has the minutes of many school board meetings on their website. What is the **unusual circumstance** about asking for copies of the school board meeting minutes that we requested? What is the **unusual circumstance** about asking for copies of any informational pamphlets, brochures, fact sheets, advertisements, or other material prepared by the Fruitport School District on behalf of the May 5 bond proposal and how this information was distributed to Fruitport School District residents? Many residents of our community have stated that they never received any information of any kind concerning the bond proposal from the Fruitport School District. Was this information sent only to selected school district residents? This is what we wanted to know and this is what Superintendent Ceglarek refused to give us. Why? What is the **unusual circumstance** about asking for a list of expenditures by the Fruitport School District on behalf of the May 5 bond proposal? We would like to know how much the school district is paying their special consultants to get this bond proposal passed. What is the **unusual circumstance** about asking for a copy of the cost analysis prepared by the Fruitport school administration on how the addition of a new high school would affect the annual school operating budget in terms of staff costs, utility costs, maintenance costs, transportation costs, etc.? The answer is, of course, that there is nothing unusual about these requests. This is simply an attempt by the Fruitport school administration to try to prohibit or delay the voters and residents of the Fruitport School District from getting information in a timely manner which would help them make a more intelligent decision concerning the bond proposal to be voted upon on May 5. And what is the exact length of the bond issue? I have heard everything from 30 to 40 years.

What is the school administration trying to hide? Why don't they want certain information, which the public

has a right to know, released to the public? The school administration is well aware of the deadline that this paper has in regards to its next edition. By refusing to give the information requested to this paper and thus, to the public, in a timely manner as stated in the Freedom of Information Act, the administration is preventing the voters of the Fruitport School District from receiving information that they have a right to know. Again, the question is why? What are they trying to hide? Why is this bond proposal being rushed through without adequate information from the school administration? Why won't they release information concerning the facility committee members? Why won't they give this newspaper, and thus the public, a list of the facility committee members? Why won't they tell us who selected these committee members and how? The answer is that this was a hand-picked committee, composed of past and present school employees, or their spouses, to reach the conclusion that the school administration and the school board desired; i.e., build a new high school whether it is needed or not. That is why Superintendent Ceglarek was hired by the school board — to get a new high school bond proposal passed. And when Mr. Ceglarek moves on to his next job, we and our children will still be paying for his new high school for the next 30 or 40 years! Why else are they afraid to give out information to the public concerning this bond proposal other than their own selected information?

The *Fruitport Area News* cannot allow this blatant attempt to suppress the people's right to know to continue. Therefore, we shall be taking Superintendent Ceglarek and the Fruitport school board to court in order to force them to comply with the Michigan Freedom of Information Act. We may or may not succeed in time for the people of our school district to receive full disclosure concerning the bond proposal before the May 5 election, but we shall try. Because the *Fruitport Area News* is printed as a public service to our community and does not make a profit, we would welcome any help that members of our community may wish to provide, either financial or otherwise, concerning the litigation against the Fruitport school superintendent. We will be fighting against a school administration and school board which will be using our own tax dollars for legal fees to try to keep us from receiving the information that we are legally entitled to receive.

It is indeed a sorry state of affairs when our elected officials, i.e., the Fruitport school board, condone such actions as Superintendent Ceglarek has exhibited. They should welcome as much information as possible to be disseminated to the public. If the \$83 million bond proposal is such a good idea, they should welcome our attempt to put as much information as possible into the hands of the voters and the public. Could it be that this \$83 million bond proposal is not as good as we are being told? Are we being misled by the school administration? Is that why they are trying to keep us from receiving the information that we have requested? I have heard that other individuals have also put in Freedom of Information requests to the school district. Are their requests being honored?

Eighty-three million dollars is a huge amount of money for a school district the size of ours. We should be absolutely sure that the proposal that Superintendent Ceglarek has put forth is indeed the best proposal for our school district and our kids. If this bond proposal passes, we will be obligating ourselves and our children to a huge tax increase for the next 30 to 40 years! Stonewalling the release of information, which would enable the voters to make a more informed decision concerning this bond proposal, is not in the best interest of our school district, ourselves, or our children.

Ron Cooper
Editor

VOTE MAY 5

DON'T ASSUME ALL WILL BE OKAY.

YOUR VOTE COUNTS!

\$83 million millage proposal: Oversites and unnecessary spending Letter to the Editor:

I have voted yes on the past two Fruitport School millages. I believe educating our children is well worth our tax dollars. What better investment for our future than strong minds and encouragement to change the world we live in?

However, the current millage requests are a bit disturbing to me. I think they are excessive and unnecessary as far as improving education. A glorious building doesn't educate our children. It will teach them first-hand about

wasteful spending. I think our current economical standing does that enough.

I also have a hard time with this \$83 million request because I've seen first-hand how the last millage was spent frivolously. My son was a sixth grade student at Fruitport Middle School two years ago. He had to share a math book and a science book with other students because there weren't enough textbooks for all students. When I called the principal at the time, he dismissed my concerns and informed me that at Fruitport they used other forms of educating and not just books. REALLY? I think books are the very BASICS! How many times a day do we hear that reading is so impotent at all age levels? It's been proven time and time again. So, as I pulled into a freshly paved parking lot in front of a nicely landscaped building with remodeled entries, and watched athletes play on new and improved fields, can you imagine my frustration? Not to mention the money spent on automatic flushing toilets...nothing like flushing OUR money down the toilets!

Who decides that these "improvements" are in the community's best interest and the education of our children? Who decided that a Culinary Arts Center would provide community-changing careers? What kinds of goals are we encouraging? Wouldn't a technology department be a much better investment? Maybe some engineering and technology skill courses would be of benefit. Stretch their minds a little.

An \$83 million dollar vote should at least warrant a survey to all community members asking OUR opinion of what WE think OUR children need in a school. Do we really NEED the type of high school they are proposing?

It appears that the decision-makers think "if we build it, they will come." It simply isn't true. Fruitport isn't down in enrollment due to "CURB APPEAL." We are not Grand Haven or Spring Lake. We cannot and should not try to keep up with the Joneses. Sure, Grand Haven and Spring Lake have new beautiful buildings, but their education levels haven't soared since then. They have always had high levels of education.

Part of the plan is to demolish both ends of Edgewood. That is where the majority of the last millage money went. They complain about Beach being the oldest building. Why not demolish that building and move those students to Shettler and Edgewood? There should be plenty of room if Edgewood students would then be moved to the middle school at the fifth grade level. That would be an entire building that would not have to be maintained and operated. Or, combine both Shettler and Beach into Edgewood, demolish Beach, and move adult and alternative education to Shettler. Have these options been discussed?

With the change of all-day kindergarten, the transportation costs will decrease significantly. What will that extra money go toward? Too many questions and not enough answers.

I am all for taxpayers' money going for education and improvements. If the school board wants to put together a reasonable millage that benefits OUR children with a strong education in an appropriate environment, they will have my vote. The current proposal does not!

Wendy Markgraf
2800 E. Sternberg Rd.

Chronicle endorsement Letter to the editor:

Nostradamus has nothing on me. With my supernatural powers, I will now look into the future and make a prediction. In just a few short weeks the *Muskegon Chronicle* will endorse the \$83,000,000 Fruitport Schools' millage request. Okay, you got me; I only know this because of empirical data. They have rarely, if ever, seen a tax increase that they weren't in support of, regardless of its bad timing or how ridiculous it seems.

Ben Willis
3262 S. Dangl

Boy Scout spaghetti dinner scheduled for April

(Submitted by Boy Scout Troop 1023)

The Fruitport Boy Scout Troop #1023 will be serving their annual homemade spaghetti and meat sauce dinner of Friday, April 17, 2009, from 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Fruitport Middle School Cafeteria, 3113 Pontaluna.

This fundraiser is to raise money to help the scouts throughout the year with their projects and activities. The cost is \$6.50 a ticket or \$20.00 for a family of five. Senior citizen tickets are just \$5.00; children 5-10 are just \$3.50; and children under the age of 5 eat for free! The spaghetti dinner also includes coleslaw, applesauce, rolls, beverages and desserts. Eat-in or take-out dinners will be available.

Thank you for supporting the Boy Scouts!•

Fruitport Youth Club sign-ups

(Submitted by the Fruitport Youth Club)

The Fruitport Youth Club is still taking last minute sign-ups for its summer baseball and softball leagues. Boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 18 are encouraged to call Jim Sutton at (616) 846-0192. Games will begin the first week of May.

The Fruitport Youth Club is dedicated to your child, the promotion of fair play, and the athletic advancement of all its participants. Please come and join us this season. •