

On March 7th, the Menomonie School Board will vote regarding potential use of Capital Improvement Funds to complete the sports complex project at the Menomonie High School that began more than seven years ago.

A recent social media post made several assertions on this topic that are not factual or are incomplete. As board members we want to make it clear that the opinions expressed below are ours and ours alone. We do not represent the entire board or the district in any way.

Our intent for this summary is not to support or detract from the sports complex but rather to ensure that the correct and complete information is in the public arena. We welcome a robust debate on this and all issues, but it is important to debate from a place of knowledge of the issue and facts surrounding it. Below is the post and our comments to each of the statements

POSTED ON FACEBOOK - On March 7th, the Menomonie School Board will vote to use \$2.6 million dollars to complete phase 3 of the athletic complex at the high school. The dollars would come out of the long-term maintenance fund. The \$2.6 million would be used for bleachers, press box, bathrooms/concessions, and artificial turf. Using \$2.6 million dollars saved for current and future maintenance for the athletic complex upgrade would be a mistake for several reasons:

1. The maintenance fund would go broke within 10 years. The plan shows the maintenance fund \$1.3 million in the hole by 2030 and \$27.5 million in the hole by 2052. The dollars to fill the hole come out of the regular operating budget. Payments out of the regular operating budget would need to increase by over \$250,000 per year to keep the maintenance fund from going broke within 10 years.

1 – Response- The Capital Plan was built to create place holders for future capital projects. Our Facilities Manager and his staff have done a great job of researching costs and making assumptions on future costs. It is correct that the plan currently projects a negative balance within 10 years with the current contribution levels. However, if we do nothing with the Sports Complex, the plan will still go negative about two years later. The original plan did not include many of the district's technology needs, which have since been added. These needs being added to the plan have had a much larger effect on the future viability of the plan than the completion of the sports complex. The technology needs are imperative for the success of our students and are also a contributing factor to when the maintenance plan goes into the red.

2. There is no increase in the per pupil revenue limit or the per pupil categorical aid for the upcoming school year. That means no extra dollars for increases in routine operating expenses or salaries for staff. There would be no extra dollars to start filling the hole in the maintenance budget.

2 – Response - It is true that for this next fiscal year the legislature eliminated any revenue limit increase. The reason the legislature gave for doing this was that schools received money from the federal government labeled as Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds through the American Recue Plan. These funds exceed the amount that the district would likely have received in aid from the state. The ESSER money did not create a large windfall for the district, as it replaced rather than supplemented state funds, but to portray this as a crisis or to say that there is no money for increases in other expenses (salaries & operating expenses) is just not correct.

3. Spending tax dollars on improving facilities when there are not enough dollars to maintain what we currently have leads to problems in the future.

3 – Response – It is important and responsible to be aware of and to plan for future expenditures. Menomonie is one of a very few districts in the state that has completed such a comprehensive plan and most importantly attempted to fund the plan far into the future. The current board has past boards to thank for that. The reality is the plan has changed, with many very important items added to the plan in the recent past to both maintain and improve facilities and student experiences making it more difficult to fully fund for the next 30 years at current contribution levels. A 30-year plan must be adjusted in both expenses and contributions as time passes.

4. UW-Stout has an excellent facility that the school district has used for years. Although concerns have been expressed about COVID-19 spectator restrictions implemented by UW-Stout during the 2020 football season, the restrictions were removed in 2021. Spending \$2.6 million to upgrade the athletic complex in order to host varsity football games due to concerns about the UW-Stout 2020 spectator restrictions is not a good use of public tax dollars.

4 – Response- Use of the Sports Complex at the High School for Varsity football on an emergency basis is only one of the many possible reasons to complete the Complex there are many much more compelling reasons to do so. Highlighted text from Dr Zydowsky's comments publicly available from the February 14th board meeting. **"Collaborating with UW Stout continues to be a good solution for varsity football, but there is a real need for expanded spectator capacity at MHS for soccer, track, and lower-level football events. The current seating arrangement at the MHS Sports Complex is not adequate for parents and fans, and the lack of a press box and suitable bathroom facilities has been problematic"**. The upgrades to the sports complex would not be sufficient to host Varsity Football games on a long-term basis. However, as stated by Dr Zydowsky if for whatever reason Stout were not able to be the venue for Varsity Football or an outdoor graduation on an emergency basis, it would be possible to host at the Sports Complex, with limited spectators at a minimum. Stout's stadium seats more than 3,000 people while the Sports Complex is only planned for seating around 1,000. Restrooms for more than 1,000 are not a part of the Sports Complex. The use of UW Stout's football stadium is a good value to the taxpayers of the district and there is no discussion occurring regarding any change to that agreement.

At the February 14th board meeting a number of reasons to complete the Sports Complex were discussed they include a lack of suitable restrooms and spectator seating as well as the opportunity to increase the usage of the playing field for boys' and girls' soccer, lower-level football, girls softball and boys baseball early in their seasons and phy ed classes. Several hundred MHS Students participate in these extracurricular activities and all students participate in phy ed at some point. None of these activities take place at UW Stout.

5. \$2.6 million should not be treated like petty cash. There should be a public hearing before moving forward on the matter.

5 – Response – No one involved in this process is treating the amount of money needed for this project as "petty cash". As with all decisions of this magnitude the board is taking this very seriously. In the original business plan for the sports complex the cost of what is now referred to as Phase 3 was estimated to be \$1.3 million. Now just seven years later the cost to complete the complex is more than double the original

estimate. The Sports Complex has been on the agenda of multiple meetings including the most recent meeting where many members of the public spoke about the project. The Sports Complex will be on the agenda of the March 7th meeting as well. People are welcome to come to the meeting to speak or they could submit their comments in writing to the administrative office as well. Additionally reaching out to board members to express your opinion is always an option as well.

Additionally we'd like to point out one item that is being greatly underappreciated in this discussion. In addition to the many advantages that the improvements would provide to the several sports teams we believe that equally important is the advantages that the additions to the sports complex would give to the normal school day. With the addition of the artificial turf the field would become another classroom, extending the number of days where the physical education classes could be on the field when at this point, they are required to stay inside due to the poor conditions of the natural grass surfaces and concerns over daily use wear and tear that impacts scheduled sporting events. Students with limited mobility would be able to maneuver around on the new field in ways that in most years they are only able to do on a very limited number of days.

In conclusion, please express your thoughts on this issue. Call board members or email us at our school emails (found on the school board section of the district website), submit comments for the board meeting or best of all come to the meeting on March 7th, at 5:30 pm and express your thoughts to everyone.

Again, the opinions expressed here are those of the authors, and only the authors, we are not speaking on behalf of the entire board.

Regards,

Board Members

Charlie Schneider
charlie_schneider@msd.k12.wi.us

Karl Palmer
karl_palmer@msd.k12.wi.us