

Birmingham Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce  
Public Policy Committee

April 15, 2015

Meeting attendees:

Jonathon Hofley

David Bloom

Dr. Daniel Nerad

Catherine Turnbull

BBCC Public Policy Committee members

Joe Bauman, ex officio

Phil Seaver

Ellen Mahoney

Alicia Green

Linda O'Donnell Hatfield

James Y. Rayis, Chair

The public policy committee of the Birmingham Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce held a meeting Wednesday morning, April 15 to gather information and position statements regarding the May 5 vote on the Birmingham Public Schools district bond proposal.

The proposed bond financing is stated to address four areas of Priority 1 concerns to the school district. These are Safety and Security, Building and Site Infrastructure, Instructional support and Technology Infrastructure.

Speaking in opposition to the bond proposal were Messrs. Jonathon Hofley and David Bloom, both residents of Birmingham. They, together with others, formed a group called Birmingham Citizens for Responsible Spending. Speaking in favor of the proposal appeared both Dr. Daniel Nerad, Superintendent of BPS District Schools and Ms. Catherine Turnbull, representative of Friends of BPS.

Mr. Bloom stated his concern that the residents have not been provided details on the bond proposal until very soon before the scheduled vote. Mr. Bloom believes it was

misguided to force a vote on the bond in May rather than wait until November when residents would have more time to analyze the spending proposals. He believes this was rushed forward to May. Also, Proposition 1 scheduled for vote on the same ballot proposes a sales tax increase which includes funding to school districts unaccounted for in the bond proposal.

Mr. Bloom pointed out to the committee that literature and information issued regarding the bond proposal is at best misleading by stating that there will be no tax increase if the bond is approved. Because prior debt financing is being retired the millage rate currently paid is scheduled to be reduced from 3.9 to 3.5 mills in July. By substituting new school district spending to maintain the current millage rate Mr. Bloom believes these facts indicate a tax increase. He also indicated that specific project spending proposals overstate the actual cost of specific items such as roofing costs and athletic facility and sports teams accoutrements. He questions why the amounts proposed equate perfectly to maintaining the current millage rather than addressing amounts of upgrade and maintenance in actual need which he believes to be less.

Mr. Bloom further stated that an outside consulting group used to review and support the proposal's Educational Technology Study was not a technology specialist and he was concerned about this. He wondered whether this same sort of outside review was equally misinformed in the other sections of the proposal which would be similarly reviewed given more time.

Mr. Jonathon Hofley then indicated that it seemed incongruous to him that up to 9% of the proposal is dedicated to roofing of the buildings. Replacement or repair at the rates indicated of \$9.50 to \$10 per square foot, totaling \$5 million in spending seemed to him almost twice the rate such item can be completed in the private sector based on professionals that he consulted with. Mr. Hofley also expressed concern that no details on the roofing costs, including insulation or energy ratings was provided or public. He said the same issue can be raised regarding the cost of athletic scoreboards and dugouts.

Mr. Hofley stated that both he and David Bloom support the BPS schools and agree that spending on improvements and maintenance is necessary and important. The issues to address concern the total volume of unnecessary and over-priced items proposed and as such should be rejected. The two men support a vote of No on the proposed ballot item.

Dr. Daniel Nerad, Superintendent of Birmingham Public Schools indicated that all of the spending proposals related to the bond were thoroughly considered and addressed continuing needs for maintenance and improvement for infrastructure and safety. He emphasized that among various priority levels the bond represented first priority items among three levels of priority need items. While other school district needs will not be addressed by the bond financing, the school board and Dr. Nerad felt that BPS district

voters should not be asked to increase tax obligations at this time but rather maintain a level millage that will allow the schools to address their most immediate needs. These specifically relate to improving building and facility safety and security, modernizing outdated technology for students and teachers, repairing failing buildings systems and structures and improving student instruction by improving and creating modern facilities for teaching and learning. For instance Dr. Nerad cited computer and technology resources that are seven years old and, basically, aged out of primary usefulness, as well as building systems such as pipes, roofing and boilers that are failing.

Ms. Catherine Turnbull of Friends of BPS indicated her strong support for the bond proposal. She serves as a board member and Treasurer of the Birmingham Education Foundation. Ms. Turnbull has compiled with other Friends of BPS significant information regarding school district needs. She strongly favors the proposal.

Ms. Turnbull questions the arguments related to overstated repair and renovation costs and believes that supporting the schools by a Yes vote will be an important factor in a healthy community and strong school district. She has gauged a significant portion of the community and believes that there is strong support. Ms. Turnbull has also provided significant information and links to the [BPSYes.org](http://BPSYes.org) website.

After the presenters concluded their presentations the Public Policy Committee reviewed the information gathered as well as publicly available information regarding the spending items proposed. Committee members felt that both presentations agreed that BPS schools need to maintain safe, quality environments for students and teachers and that spending to reach a desirable level of quality is required. Some members felt that the opponents focused on two or three specific line items on a proposal covering hundreds of needed repair and upgrades. One member wonders whether the Proposal 1 issue raised will not be thwarted if approved, as was the state lottery spending, by having the legislature then reduce school allocations by amounts earmarked by the new sales tax fund.

While the Committee is not able to take a position or recommend how to vote, information and insight into the bond and its spending items can only help inform Chamber member BPS voters as to a position on their votes.