

## **For Kid's Sake**

### **May 1, 2008**

In the next thirteen days, the citizens of Springfield, the parents, business people, community leaders and the education community, will increase discussion about the use of Park Street School as a school. This decision will be the most important decision for the community since the bond vote in 2006. I am extremely concerned that the facts may be interpreted incorrectly and folks will not be able to make a clear and accurate decision. Because of the importance I am writing this article.

I am enclosing in this letter the entire proposal that was placed before the board for their examination. Each of you can read it and decide for yourself. The school administration will follow the direction of the board and its final decision. This is and must be a community decision. We work for you. The failing economy and higher costs for everything means to me that the school district must do everything in its power to reduce its costs. And, at the same time, protect and maintain its facilities, protect and maintain its educational program and keep taxes as low as possible.

This proposal does all of that. Much has changed in the two years since the original bond passed which included a commitment to, over the next ten years, raise the money to bring Park Street School into full parity with Elm Hill and Union Street schools. That cost is now at a conservative estimate of \$ 35,000,000. The first installment needed to be the plumbing repairs, at \$ 1,763,000, which was defeated earlier this year. Because of that vote and public demand for a decision, the Park Street question will be brought to the voters to decide on May 13, 2008.

The short version of the proposal is this:

- It will require an additional 22 to 25 million dollars to keep Park Street as a school of equal quality with Elm Hill and Union Street.
- The money we currently have is sufficient to add onto Elm and Union to house our current and projected kindergarten through fourth grades. They will still be small community schools at an optimum size for effectiveness, according to small school research.
- Riverside Middle School has the physical space to be a fifth through eighth grade school, consistent with best practice and middle school research and philosophy.
- Park Street School continues to be used and maintained as a community treasure.
- We reduce administration and staff, and save on rents and building maintenance costs.
- It is the only affordable option, saving between 6 and 7 cents on future tax rates.

The entire proposal follows. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions.

## *Two Elementary School Concept for Springfield, VT.*

### **Beliefs:**

1. We need to do the very best possible for our students and children with the funds available.
2. We need to provide equal treatment in facility quality and size for all of our students.
3. We need to recognize the changing economic conditions in the state: the inability to raise more tax money, the effects of Act 68, the effects of Act 82 and the decreasing level of federal tax dollars, as these things impact Springfield tax payers.
4. We must honor the history and importance of the Park Street School building as a cornerstone of Springfield's future.

### **Facts:**

1. We have a bond for approximately \$ 33 million for new construction and renovation of Elm Hill and Union Street Schools and beginning renovation of Park Street School.
2. The current budget divides the money roughly at \$ 8.5 million at Elm, \$ 11 million at Union and \$ 13.5 million at Park
3. These amounts will provide a "New" school for 140 students at Elm, and 220 students at Union, but only fix the most critical safety issues at Park Street with 350 students.
4. Park Street will require at least an additional \$ 22 million, and probably \$ 25 million in annual budget articles for the foreseeable future to complete the work at Park as promised in the bond advertising.

### **Problems with the current plan:**

1. It only recognizes the fourth belief statement above.
2. It does not provide equity and equal access or opportunity for all children.
3. It causes the tax rate in Springfield to increase by at least 5 cents and maybe as much as 7 cents per \$ 100 of evaluation because of the loss of State Aid for consolidation and an inefficient organizational structure.
4. Only half of our K - 5 children will benefit from the local tax effort to improve education for the children of Springfield.

## **The Buildings**

**Elm Hill** - Currently/did have seven (7) classrooms.

The current plan would add a music/art room, student support space, library and nurses office. Elm will have one (1) classroom for each grade level K through 5 and room for support services. Everything will be totally new or renovated.

**Union Street** – Currently has thirteen (13) classrooms.

The current plan would add a music/art room, student support space, library and nurses office and three (3) additional classrooms. This would provide two (2) K classrooms, Bridges, and two (2) classrooms each 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> and accommodate support services. Everything will be totally new or renovated.

**Park** – Currently has fifteen (15) classrooms and appropriate support spaces and houses the District Offices. The current plan would remove the District Offices to provide three (3) additional classrooms for increasing enrollments. Other than support spaces, there would be 3 classrooms for each grade level K through 5. The building will be given a Sprinkler System, new wiring for communications, new windows and heating system as well as a new fire alarm system. Minimal site work will be done.

## **The Proposal**

Elm Hill and Union Street would each be increased in size to accommodate 15 regular classrooms each, or three (3) sections each of grades K-4. Sending the fifth (5) grade to Riverside will help to limit the size of the buildings and allow us to stay within cost constraints.

Park Street School can house the District Central Offices, Early Essential Education Offices, Information Technology, and, hopefully, host Not for Profit Educationally Related Program Offices. Offices would be located in the 1895 portion of the building with Central Offices located on the first floor to accommodate access. These changes would allow us to reopen the grand staircases and restore the beauty of the building.

The 1929 portion of the building could house the Gateway Program, The Precision Valley Alternative Program, and the after-school LEAP program. This will facilitate substantial savings in rent payments for these programs. The maintenance department will continue to have shop and storage space. Park will continue to need renovation work, but will not require the extensive classroom renovations.

Southern Vermont Recreation, Town Recreation and other programs will be able to use the Park Street gym and auditorium for basketball, exercise and dance programs and events. Both elementary schools will have access to host their concerts, plays and assemblies. The building will serve district needs and also become a community resource.

## Estimated Potential Savings with Two Elementary Schools

ITEM	SAVINGS	BASIS
Bond Principal	215,000	\$4.3 add. State Aid
Bond Interest Year One	193,500	4.5% Interest
Maintenance at East School	42,500	FY08 Budget
Administrative Staffing Efficiencies	101,000	2 Princ. 4 Sec. Staff
(Better Use of Support, Sp. Ed. and Remedial Services)	270,000	Guid. Nurse, Title I, Music, Art reductions
Rental Savings - Central Office	50,000	A future cost if Park remains a school
Rental Savings - Alternative HS Program	55,000	FY08 Budget
Rental Savings – EEE Program	8,000	FY08 Budget
<b>Total Est. Savings</b>	<b>935,000</b>	

It needs to be noted that these are rough estimates but do provide an idea of what is involved.

For those interested in the tax formula, this reduces our per equalized pupil expenditure by \$ 695 assuming approximately 1,346 equalized pupils. On current year taxes, this would have saved 6.9 cents on the residential tax rate. This is only an indication of the potential savings over the current plan, but is at least an idea of the difference.

### Overall Benefits:

- 1. All children will be in an improved educational environment.**
- 2. Park Street School building will be utilized and improved.**
- 3. Small school concept is maintained. (Research indicates small schools between 300 and 700 students are the most educationally effective.)**
- 4. Residential taxpayers will save between 6 and 7 cents per \$ 100 of evaluation on their school tax rate.**

**Respectfully,  
Frank S. Perotti, Jr., Ed.D.  
Superintendent**