

?Remonstrance petition against proposed Morgan Elementary School project filed June 11

Written by Administrator

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?A petition filed June 11 in the Harrison County Clerk's office to block the renovation project concerning Morgan Elementary School near Central Barren has been verified with 121 valid signatures. The petition drive was led in part by North Harrison Classroom Teacher's Association president Greg Rupp.

The administration is still proceeding with the project for now, according to North Harrison Supt. Dr. Phil Partenheimer, "If the board approves to go forward, we'll see who can get the most signatures."

If the North Harrison Board of School Trustees does decide to move forward, there will be a 30 day "cooling off period", in which both sides simply let the matter lie, without any petitions being circulated by either side. Dr. Partenheimer said the cooling off period would probably be from the July board meeting to the August board meeting.

Then, each side would have a 30 day period in which to collect the most signatures on their petition. If the administration gets the most signatures, the building project goes forward. If the side objecting to the project gets the most people to sign their petition, the matter goes to a referendum on the November 2008 ballot.

The referendum is a new result from a law passed by the Indiana Legislature.

If it comes to a referendum, Dr. Partenheimer said "forget it," with regards to the chances of being able to renovate Morgan. He said he didn't think that taxpayers would actually pass it, if it came to a referendum.

Dr. Partenheimer said he wasn't surprised that the remonstrance passed. "I guess I'd say I expected it, because it's easy to go up to someone and say do you want your taxes raised?" Dr. Partenheimer also thought that some of the people that signed the remonstrance against the project might be persuaded to sign the petition for the project, which would be circulated by the administration.

Dr. Partenheimer said that 15 to 20 people who signed the petition against the project have asked him, "What did I sign?"

The \$15 million project would cost \$11 million in bonds, and \$4 million would be taken from the corporation's Rainy Day Fund.

Rupp said he thinks that Dr. Partenheimer is trying to rush the process along, in order to avoid a possible referendum in the fall.

"He's rushing," Rupp said. "It's not going to go well."

Despite the \$4 million that would not come from the tax rolls, but the Rainy Day Fund instead, Rupp said he thinks that the tax rates would go up anyway. He estimated that the tax on a \$100,000 house would go up \$150 per year. "It's all smoke and mirrors," Rupp said.

With regards to the "15 to 20 people" who signed the remonstrance petition, and were later unsure as to what they had signed, Rupp claimed that several were employees of the school corporation, who are now worried about their jobs. Rupp said he was surprised about the fact the names of people who signed the initial petition were public knowledge. "I thought they were confidential," he added.

Rupp emphasized that he wasn't against a Morgan renovation, as such. "In my mind, Morgan needs a remake as much as North Harrison," he said. North Harrison Elementary is nearing completion of a major renovation/construction project.

Rupp said that he disagreed with the use of the \$4 million in the Rainy Day fund in the proposed Morgan renovation.

With contract talks at an impasse between the North Harrison Classroom Teacher's Association (NHCTA) and the North Harrison administration, the teachers are now teaching

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under a contract that expired in July 2004.

Rupp said he thinks that the administration is purposely trying to use the Rainy Day Fund for the Morgan renovation in order to make it impossible to use the funds for teacher's raises.

"He's trying to spend every nickel he can get," said Rupp.

Pointing out that high demand for construction grade steel from mainland China has sent the price of the steel higher and higher, Dr. Partenheimer stressed the need to start construction before the price of construction materials (such as steel) go up again. Dr. Partenheimer said that asteel is increasing by 20 percent per year.

Dr. Partenheimer found the opposition's position against using the \$4 million in Rainy Day Funds odd. "Basically, Greg (Rupp) is saying he's for the project if it's \$15 million."

Dr. Partenheimer said there were several main reasons for proceeding as planned with the project. He listed them: 1-Greater safety for car riders and bus riders (who have to board their rides home from the same area-the project would place the bus boarding area in back of the school); 2-Take care of overcrowding and the future need for portables; 3-Better safety in school layout, without possible building code violations; 4-Better safety for the public, students, and staff, since the new office would require all patrons entering the building to enter through the office

area first; 5-A bigger lunchroom, allowing more students time to eat, as opposed to standing in line for it. Dr. Partenheimer thinks that the project has a better chance of passing if the \$4 million in Rainy Day Fund money is used, because the Property Tax Control Board has been turning down several other projects around the state, due to costs. If approved by the Property Tax Control Board, the project would then have to be approved by the Dept. of Local Finance.