

Kristy Raber Answers to Questions:

“After checking with counsel, I was told that the only time it is appropriate to share my opinion is at an open meeting. I will ask the President to put our contact on agenda for new business this Thursday. Thanks for your understanding.”

John McMenamain Answers to Questions

Required Disclaimer:

I am an elected Member of the LBI Consolidated School Board. I am one of the two Board Members that represent the Borough of Surf City. I have been asked to answer the following questions for the Surf City Taxpayers Association. I am providing these answers as my personal opinion only, as a resident of Surf City and a member of the public. The following answers do not reflect the opinions or positions of the LBI School Board or my opinion or position as a Member of the LBI School Board.

- **Can you explain why you voted the way you did on the referendum?**

I think the question should be worded “Why would a School Board Member(s) not vote for a funding referendum that would provide for an adequate heating system in the classrooms so our children are not cold during sessions, a referendum that would provide for handicapped entrance/exit ramps and handicapped bathrooms for our special needs children and a referendum for the needed electrical, plumbing and structural updating and repairs? Especially at a time when the State of New Jersey will contribute up to 40% of the needed renovations, 34% for the first year. I have always been a proponent of fixing the LBI School. Initially I voted not to go to a public referendum for funding as I felt the Board could generate enough income from the sale of the EJ School property to Surf City and Ship Bottom based previous offers to purchase for the sum of 5.3 million dollars. This, combined with the School’s district capital reserve, we would have enough funds to make the improvements LBI School without any tax impact or tax increase to LBI residents. However, with no current offer from Ship Bottom on the table along with time constraints on needed repairs, I felt it best to reintroduce the funding referendum. Should a sale of the EJ School property be successful, the Board could use the proceeds to pay off the balance of the bond early, relieving the taxpayer burden. Since the initial offering, Surf City has discussed possibly increasing their offer to 3 million dollars for their portion of the EJ school property. The property would be used for much need open space and borough use. Currently, Surf City has the least amount of open space of any town on Long Beach Island. To date, there have been no offers from Ship Bottom to purchase their portion of the EJ School that I am aware of.

- Are you in favor of consolidating into one school regardless of which school it is?
 - Do you have a preference on which school is closed and why?

I have always been in favor of consolidating into the LBI School for many reasons.

First, the EJ School is more apt to succumb to a storm surge and flood waters given the fact that it is below flood water elevation and its closer proximity to Baywaters as opposed to the LBI School, which is above flood water elevation.

Second, I think you have to lay out the boundaries of the EJ School. Many residents especially from other towns, are under the misconception that the EJ School encompasses all of the open space between South 2nd to West 5th St.. when in reality all of the open property from West 4th St. to Barnegat Blvd. and South to West 5th St. has no relationship to the school. The EJ School property ends on the North Side of West 4th St alongside the playground equipment.

Third, Given the actual property boundary lines of the EJ School and the location of the EJ structure in the middle of the property, if you to add the needed classrooms to accommodate the more than doubling of students, maintain the same parking lot size (which in reality would also need to be doubled in size to accommodate the additional staff and visitor parking from the LBI school) add bus parking and a new bus garage, you would end up with less open space than the LBI school.

Regarding the LBI School:

Its 1 ½ times bigger than the EJ School, Can accommodate the entire LBI School District student population without the need for additions, The LBI School is above flood elevation (as such can be used as emergency shelter). It is Further away from the bay and less apt to storm surge. The LBI School is newer and more modern overall with 4 major additions and many renovations over the years. The latest being the construction of an entire new wing in 1994 and foundation improvements in 2002. Just this year, new playground equipment was installed, new bus garage roof installed and a new Gym floor.

- A taxpayer pointed out the stream running under the LBI school – and suggested the referendum dollars do not cover any impact from that. Did the board (or the construction expert) address this?

There is no evidence of any stream that runs under the LBI School that would impact the structure. People in opposition to repairing the LBI School have been making this unsubstantiated argument for years. There have been engineers that have testified that this is not true along with topographical studies, surveys and soil core samples that demonstrate there are no issues with the LBI School Structure or its location.

- Can you help us understand your vote to open negotiations on the sale of the EJ school?

First, I would like to inform the taxpayers that the vote was unanimous with all board members voting to negotiate the sale of the Surf City portion of the property back to Surf City. Finally, we all agree on something!

From speaking with long-time residents that had knowledge of the Schools acquisition in the 1950s, I was informed that, at that time, the LBI Grade school was over populated and had over 350 students. The School District was contemplating an addition to the LBI school or acquiring new property to build for the overflow. It is clear in the recorded property reverter clause in the property transfer contract that Surf City never wanted sell the property, however, in a kind gesture to help the resident children of LBI they agreed to let the school district use the property under one condition, the property revert back to Surf City when it is no longer necessary for a School. Currently, there are only 172 resident students, less than half the students that once occupied the LBI School before the EJ School was created. The School District no longer needs the EJ School. Surf City's current proposal of 3 million was conditioned upon allowing enough time for the repairs to be completed to the LBI School.

I am taken back when I hear board members from other towns attempting to capitalize from Surf City's generosity. Even one of the Surf City School Board representatives wanted Surf City taxpayers to pay more stating that they (Surf City) shouldn't get the property for "pennies on the dollar" as quoted in the local Sand Paper. I have yet to hear the same representatives that voice their disapproval, demand their towns and taxpayers pay more money for open space land acquisitions such as the Coast Guard properties and other county, state and federal lands.

- Why do you feel there not yet a strategic plan in place for the district so that decisions could be made according to a plan?

There is a Strategic plan in place that was formulated by the Engineers and School Officials. Possible repair schedules have been discussed that would not interfere with student scheduling and a new LBI School layout was developed which incorporates the added grade levels and additional student population once the repairs are completed and students are transferred from the EJ School. It all hinges on the approval of the referendum.

- Why do you believe the school board has been unable to come to actionable agreement on a plan in the last 10 years?

I look at it this way, should the referendum go through, the improvements will made to the LBI School over a 2-3 year period. The students (who through natural progression would be transferred to the LBI School regardless), will get the same exact education that they currently receive, no different. They will have the same teachers at

the same grade levels. The student number in each class will remain the same and the educational material will be the same, if not better.

Past Boards prematurely spent nearly 1 million dollars pursuing basically a new addition to the EJ school before even getting voter approval, which eventually failed, all the while students were deprived of educational field trips and State Inspectors designated District School Busses unsafe to transport children and removed from service.

I believe there is a lot of resentment by current Board Members from that period who will stop at nothing to force the EJ School on the public. There are also a lot of costly ethics complaints that go back and forth behind the scenes. In my opinion, they are generated in an attempt to gain majority decisions by nullify the voting privileges of board members that don't vote in line with their desires. These costly ethics complaints generate a lot of animosity between board members and generate substantial legal fees which deplete the funds we use to educate our children. This year alone the District is on track to spend tens of thousands of dollars defending ethics complaints.

The disrespect demonstrated by Board Members toward other Board Members is a big obstacle to overcome. The name calling, disparaging comments on peoples looks, demeaning emails and even threat to do harm are all things we teach our children not to do but are all alive and well in communications between certain Members. I truly give some Member(s) credit for enduring such acts, looking past this unnecessary treatment and not throwing in the towel for the benefit of children of the District and the residents that voted you onto the School Board.

There is also the matter that several board members that are either teacher(s) or have a relatives that are teachers. Even though a majority of board members, including myself, that would like to see a reduction of teachers through attrition with no teacher layoffs, there are some, I believe, that would like to keep both schools open to employ more teachers. In my opinion, this is the main reason previous boards committed the District to approving the expense of Choice Students from out of the area, to increase the student population requiring additional teachers, all at the expense of LBI taxpayers. Out-of-District Choice Students make up nearly 25% of the entire school population.

Do you feel the state is going to step in to force decisions we don't want in our schools?

- o What protects us from that? What would prevent the state from intervening?

The LBI School District was identified as one of the few Districts the Governor Murphy wants to see consolidated. I think the State will step in and force consolidation if the referendum doesn't go through and we don't follow the current path and combine both schools into the LBI School. If the referendum doesn't pass then the state may push for a larger consolidation effort to include the Stafford Elementary Schools, which are having funding issues. If that happens it could lead to a situation where the current LBI/Southern regional tax formula is also applied to consolidation with Stafford Elementary Schools, a formula where LBI taxpayers fund 80% of the entire consolidated budget.

- Can you explain why the Board not been able to come to agreement to include the Beach Haven school in our district?

I think there are Three factors that control why the Beach Haven School District doesn't want to come to an agreement to combine with the LBI District.

First, Beach Haven would have representation on the Board if it combined with the LBI School District but it would not enjoy being the sole controlling body as it does now.

Second, though I have not seen documentation, I understand that there is a reverter clause regarding the property that the Beach Haven School sits on. If Beach Haven is going through the same decrease in student population as the LBI District is going through, I believe its just a matter of time before we combine.

The third hindrance is the state of instability with the current LBI School Board. Does Beach Haven really want to contend with a contentious School Board? Until the LBI Schools consolidate into the one school, I believe the discontent will continue with certain Board Members. There is way too much incivility and no respect for other Board Member opinions and positions.

- Why do you feel the district is running a deficit? What do you recommend to deal with this?

Reasons:

- Operational costs and duplication of services in maintaining and staffing 2 separate schools.
- Salary and health benefit increases.
- Free child care for employees.
- Out-of-district Pre K tuition should be increased and LBI In -district children should be free of charge
- Currently Stafford charges \$8000 for out of district Pre K while LBI charges \$3500 for both in-district and out-of-district students.
- Choice students cause an additional strain on the budget.
- The LBI School District cost per student is approx. \$34,000, the State of New Jersey funds approx. \$12,000 per each Choice student.
- LBI taxpayers subsidize the remaining \$22,000 per Choice student.
- Legal fees could be much less by having the current staff perform tasks in areas where no attorney is necessary.

- What are you hoping to accomplish in the coming year on the school board?

First and foremost is ensuring that our students have the best possible tools for a first rate education.

Second, Should the referendum go through, I hope to stay on course with repairs to the LBI school and proceed with the smooth transition of students into the LBI school after completion. Move to sell the EJ School property to Surf City and Ship Bottom for open space and much needed municipal space. Use the proceeds from the sale to pay off the remainder of the bond thus relieving taxpayer burden.

Third, do more than status quo. Conduct a study on how schools with a lower cost per pupil receive much higher student educational ratings. What are we doing or not doing to improve our curriculum and ratings.

End the School Choice Program by not accepting new Choice Students and allowing current Choice students to continue their education through graduation. This would not only lead to a reduction in staff through attrition it would also lead to room to accommodate Beach Haven students should they decide to consolidate with the LBI District.

In closing, I want to emphasize to Surf City taxpayers the importance of voting "YES" to pass the referendum. I believe the taxpayers associations from other towns that endorse and push for the referendum to fail are doing their constituents a disservice by not explaining the consequences of its failure. We will receive up to 40% back, 34% for the first year. So, for the \$7.6 million in renovations we could receive \$3 million back. If the referendum doesn't pass, what do we fall back on?

If you think the revisiting the plan for the EJ School was cost effective think again. The \$18 million dollar referendum that was proposed years ago failed to disclose the millions of additional dollars that would be required to move the major utilities infrastructure in the location of the planned addition to the EJ School. It also didn't include the additional School Bus garage and the additional staff and visitor parking required. Couple this with the increase costs in building materials, labor and new building regulation requirements over the past years since the failed referendum and we are looking at a price tag of nearly \$40 million dollars for construction costs, bonding fees and bond interest (25 million construction cost and 14 million in bonding fees and interest). To sum it up, \$40 million for an addition to the EJ School where the main school requires structural and utility repairs and is located below flood elevation, closer to the bay and more apt to succumb to flood waters. The entire project was and still is legally questionable as an improvements to over 50% percent of existing structure requires the entire building to be brought up to current code. Costs to raise the EJ School above flood elevation wasn't quoted in the failed referendum.

To further sidetrack and prolong the issue, a Board Member that opposes the referendum, raised the issue that the Board should consider demolishing the school and starting all over. So consider this, if an addition to the EJ School will cost taxpayers \$40 million, what do you think an entirely new school twice the size of the addition will cost? Is \$80 million a fair number?

This \$7.6 million funding referendum this Tuesday December 10, 2019 takes into account the worst case scenario. There are no cost overruns anticipated.

We need your Vote.

Vote "YES" to pass the School Repair Funding Referendum.

Save the LBI School.