

Martha R. Lang, Ph.D.
138 Colchester Avenue
Burlington, VT 05401
(802) 862-1094

February 24, 2014

President Shannon and
The Burlington Board of Finance
City Hall
149 Church Street
Burlington, VT 05401

Re: St. Joseph's School: Problems with the Attempted Purchase

Dear President Shannon and the Burlington Finance Board:

I. Urban Planning. If the proposed property transaction on Taft School and St. Joseph's School is approved, St. Joseph's School will be the third public school within an half mile radius. However, it is Ward 5 that has the school overcrowding: students from Ward 5 are bused to the New North End schools where there is available classroom space. Also, the narrow streets around St. Joseph's School, located in a residential area, makes it a less than an ideal location for more school traffic. Furthermore, there are only thirty-one parking spaces at St. Joseph's School compared to eighty parking spaces at Taft School.

II. K- 8th Grades: The Proposed Use for St. Joseph's. There is a plan to use St. Joseph's School for K - 8th grades. How does this K - 8th grade model enhance the education of the Burlington school children? If it does, shouldn't all of the Burlington schools have K-8th grade groupings? Has anyone asked the parents of the elementary age students who might be attending St Joseph's if they want their children with older, and bigger, middle-school students? South Burlington parents are vehemently opposed to having even their fifth graders moved to the middle school with sixth through eighth graders. How is St. Joseph's K-8th grade grouping different?

III. The \$200,000 Lease Payments to be Taken from the School Maintenance Budget. The school department plans to enter into a lease/purchase agreement with St. Joseph's Parish for \$2 M beginning with a lease payment of \$200,000. The school department plans to take the first \$200,000 payment from the school maintenance budget. The next \$200,000 payment would also be funded with school maintenance money: they plan to ask for an increase in the school maintenance allowance from 1.5 % to 1.75 % so the \$200,000 payment will be available. The last time the school department used such a scheme with maintenance money was to buy 59 Murray Street for \$210,000. That cost was rolled into the \$1.25 M school debt for fiscal 2015, and the school department couldn't even use the building.

Page 2. Letter February 12, 2014, Martha R. Lang.

IV. \$8 M to Renovate St. Joseph's School. The school department keeps referring to renovations costs of \$1.6 M for St. Joseph's School. However, the most recent study by the school department in October, 2013 determined the cost to be closer to \$8 M.

V. Probate Court and the Taft School. The onetime payment of \$1.6 M by the possible buyer of Taft School is designed as an eighty year lease (sale). It seems this arrangement is an attempt to circumvent the Probate Court Order dated September 18th, 2008 that says the school department cannot sell Taft School it can only be leased, primarily for educational purposes. One million six hundred thousand is the appraised value of Taft School. With this deal the monthly lease payments on a 25,000 square foot building are \$1,666 per month. That price is less than the rent for a three bedroom apartment in the area. Moreover, the current tenant, Burlington Telecom, is paying \$6 a square foot for rent at Taft School but the proposed agreement would only charge the new tenant 82 cents a square foot. Clearly this lease is an attempt to sell Taft School.

VI. \$410,00 Debt on the Ira Allen School Building. The school department hopes to sell the Ira Allen Building at 150 Colchester Avenue for \$2 M and pay off the mortgage on St. Joseph's School. There is no guarantee the Ira Allen building will be sold. And, there is a \$410,000 debt on the Ira Allen Building owed to the state of Vermont, when the building is sold.

VII. Zoning Problems. If the Ira Allen Building is sold, where will the school administrative offices be moved to? Recently there have been discussions on moving the staff to H. O. Wheeler School. However, like St. Joseph's School, H. O. Wheeler is in a residential medium (RM) zone which does not permit office/administrative work.

Sincerely,

Martha R. Lang.

Enclosure

cc:

Burlington City Council
Elizabeth Curry, Burlington School Commissioner



STATE OF VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
120 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

October 28, 2005

Jeanne Collins, Superintendent
Burlington City School District
150 Colchester Ave
Burlington VT 05401

Re: Vermont School Building Aid for Taft School and the Early Essential Education Ctr

Dear Superintendent Collins:

Thank you for your inquiry about a section of Vermont's Title 16 regarding the potential repayment of state aid upon sale of a school building.

The statute in question is 16 VSA §3448 (b) Refund Upon Sale, which I believe took effect July 1, 1970. In the case of the possible sale of the vacated Taft School building and the building that use to be the Early Essential Educational Center in Burlington, the maximum amount that would potentially be refunded is \$410,364.38. This amount is for school construction aid paid to the EEE Center. In my research I did not find any state construction aid paid for the Taft school

Vermont state aid of \$202,385.85 in 1973, \$172,290.32 in 1975 and \$35,688.21 in 1976 are the payments clearly attributed to the EEE Center found in my research.

If the school district can offer records of payments of Vermont state school building aid that differ from our records, please submit a request for reconsideration.

I hope this information is useful to you. If I can be of any further assistance, I can be reached at (802) 828-3144.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donna L. Trucksess".

Donna L. Trucksess
School Construction Program

cc: Scott Lisle, Business Manager
Lyman Amsden, Advisor