

**October 7, 2020 - WASATCH WAVE**

## **Wasatch School District Denies Release of Public Info**

To the Editor:

If you haven't received our Wasatch Taxpayers Association (WTPA) email alerts, or been on local Facebook pages, you would be unaware that the WTPA has been GRAMA requesting information from the Wasatch School District on the property involved in the failed \$150 MIL School Bond last November. Since January 2020, we have had to appeal the Wasatch School District's (WSD) denial of one document in particular; a 2019 BIO-WEST Engineer's WETLANDS Delineation Study. The contract with BIO-WEST was canceled by Wasatch School District soon after that report. It may shed light on how many acres of wetlands were found on the property, and how expensive the mitigation might be for taxpayers in perpetuity. Please go to [WasatchTaxpayersAssociation.com](http://WasatchTaxpayersAssociation.com) to get more details of the situation, but to summarize, it took us nine months and a successful appeal to the Utah State Record's Committee August 2020, to finally require the School District to release this document to the public.

Unfortunately, the Wasatch School Board has decided to appeal the State Records Committee's decision in District Court. This will cost taxpayers more money, could delay its release for months, and push it past the upcoming school board elections. Why fight so hard to keep it secret? What could possibly be on that WETLANDS Study? They do have the right to appeal to District Court by Utah GRAMA law, but we have never heard of any public entity denying the release to their TAXPAYERS after the State Records Committee had announced an order to release.

Both citizens, and our local public officials, have tried to get answers from our School District in the past week about a number of issues. 1) Why was the \$6 MIL North Fields high school land purchased only one month BEFORE the failed November 2019 bond election? 2) Where did that \$6 MIL come from, when the failed bond was supposed to reimburse the cost of that purchase? 3) Why did the school board decide to buy the land prior to getting an approval to build on WETLANDS from the Army Corps of Engineers? 4) Why were the other Wasatch County public officials told in an Aug 8, 2019 Interlocal meeting that the School District's due diligence with the Army Corps was being done then, when the School District hadn't even contacted them by October 2019, when we checked? The School District recently admitted that they are working with the Army Corps and will receive their findings in 30-60 days, consequently admitting it wasn't done last year, and again conveniently receiving it well past the school board election.

What's most concerning to us is that neither the current school board members, nor the superintendent, can make themselves available to answer direct questions in public. They will suggest a private meeting with a citizen, but we strongly feel it should be discussed in an open forum for all.

Kirsta Albert, a School District public relations person on Facebook, tries to answer any questions from the citizens which so far, have been mostly written statements from the

board. Taxpayers paid her PR salary and benefits last year, totaling \$145K. (Readily available on the Utah public data website- [transparent.utah.gov](http://transparent.utah.gov)).

Also, on the September 30th Wasatch County Interlocal meeting, attended by many County and City Council officials, the School Board sent John Moss to answer questions. He stated that the school board did not have ample notice of the meeting to attend themselves, but at least three school board members were invited via email to this meeting in August and on Sept 18th. Unfortunately, John Moss was not involved in these land decisions and did not know most answers to the public official's questions. We were told last year that Mr. Moss was helping with PR only until the school bond election, but he's still representing the school district now. His PR salary and benefits from 2017-2019 appear to be \$165K, in addition to his teacher's salary and retirement benefits of \$296K, since 2017.

Both of these public relations people have recently cost taxpayers \$310K to be buffers between the superintendent and the school board, and the citizens and elected officials who want answers. Other Utah School Districts are able to communicate directly with their Boards and Superintendents.

Wasatch Superintendent, Paul Sweat, is not elected and takes his direction from the school board. He should be constantly communicating with citizens and elected officials even when a school bond is NOT on the ballot. His salary and benefits between 2017-2019 appear to be \$630,119. Yet, he cannot make himself available for interviews by some radio stations or newspapers, or be capable of defending himself in the appeal WTPA made to the State Records Committee. He hired an attorney, with our tax dollars, to defend HIS decision not to release this document. The Records Committee determined that since tax dollars (\$5700) paid for the study, it should be released to the public.

The school board election will be one of your decisions on the ballot, being mailed in a week. Three of the five seats are up for election- Midway, County South, and County East. Incumbents should have to answer these questions, if they want to be re-elected.

Also, look for the Pledge (In this edition of THE WAVE) that was presented by Heidi Franco, Heber City Council, during the Sept. Interlocal Meeting. Many elected officials, and 2020 candidates, have signed it so far. We support this Pledge which encourages respecting the taxpayers' and public officials' input, transparency, and that truthful communication is key to handling the many impacts rapid growth brings.

We would rather see our taxes well managed and used directly in the classroom, rather than for unnecessary public relations people or attorneys.

Please join us at [WasatchTaxpayersAssociation.com](http://WasatchTaxpayersAssociation.com) to be informed and involved!

Tracy Taylor

Chair, Wasatch Taxpayers Association