

Opinions

EDITORIALS

A second high school

The Charleston County School District began a series of community meetings last week in the quest to determine if we need a second high school east of the Cooper.

In the 1997-98 school year, a community engagement process was launched to evaluate whether Mount Pleasant needed a second high school. It was determined a second high school was not needed.

However growth and demographic trends have changed since then and what we call the new Wando High School is now at capacity.

It is time to determine what needs to be done, when it will be done and how it will be done.

The recommendations of a Blue Ribbon Committee for School Accountability, appointed by Mount Pleasant Mayor Harry Hallman in 2005 has so far aligned with the school districts planned projects. It appears the voice of East Cooper was heard.

Even then the district and the community knew the area was growing quickly and Wando would exceed enrollment capacity. But when and by how much, no one knew.

The district had the foresight to put a wedge in the budget to fund a study to see what the future would hold for high school students.

Last week, the wheels of that study were put into motion.

High School Options

The planning group is made up of local teachers, principals, students, Wando graduates, parents, community leaders and members of the former advisory group. Each one of these members represent a constituency of some sort.

Beginning with no preconceived notion or options this group can make great strides. There are a lot of possibilities and sufficient engagement of the community will further strengthen the process.

Su Robertson of the Planning Alliance, and educational planning service, led the previous process. She is again heading up this effort to assist the district in exploring facility options for high school students in District Two.

She has organized seven meetings, two of which are designed exclusively for community dialogue. Five of the meetings are stakeholder meetings designed to gather information.

The process will provide a framework for analyzing demographics and enrollment projection information, as well as pertinent school district and community data. Another function of the planning process is to engage the community in understanding the concepts and helping to develop school facility solutions that will respond to the educational program offerings in District Two for the next 10-20 years.

When the public comes to the community dialogue meetings, they will be presented with detailed, factual information, then placed into working groups with at least one member of the committee. At the end of the night, all comments, questions and concerns will be submitted to Robertson in writing. These meetings are not open mic night. They are considered workshop and information gathering sessions and should be treated as such. Everything will be compiled and used as yet another working tool for the committee.

The end result will be a recommended master plan presented to the CCSD school board as well as East Cooper municipal officials in the fall. A clear direction should emerge from the countless hours that will be put into this process.

Issues

It is likely the town and school growth will level off over next 10 years. But Wando was built for 3,000 students, not 4,000.

It is possible another high school is needed. In the event it is, the district did the right thing by purchasing land adjacent to the old school on Whipple Road.

Woodland Hall sits right next door and is closing at the end of the year. That purchase was a strategic purchase on the district's part. Worst case scenario, the district finds it does not need the property and can easily sell it off.

The panel will need to look at the proximity of this site to population projections and growth patterns if a second high school is indeed required.

If a second high school is needed, what's going to convince residents who have no stakes in the school system that spending this kind of taxpayer money will be beneficial to them? Access, availability and use of school facilities by the community at large is a must.

Anyone who's graduated or watched their children graduate from Wando have a sense of ownership in that school. Will a second high school divide or polarize the community? Or will it allow twice as many kids to participate in activities they might not have had the chance to do at one high school, such as athletics.

Should a second high school be geared for students who want to learn a skill or trade rather than head off to college?

The biggest concern of the panel should be who their decision will effect and what services will be required to meet the future needs of high school education. It will likely be 2013 before a second school can be built.

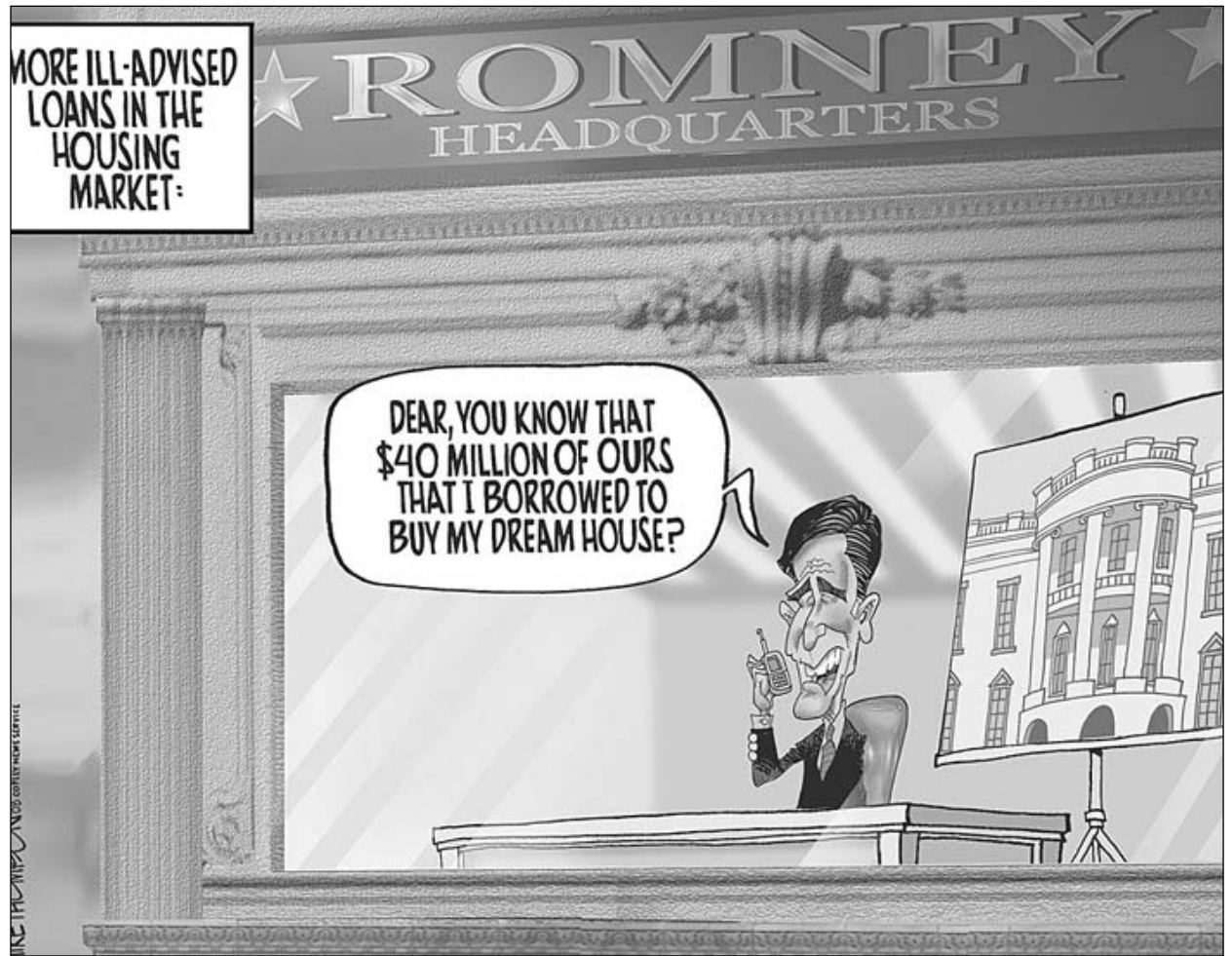
Whatever option is chosen must not degrade the existing educational opportunities offered at Wando.

These are not closed door meetings. However they are specifically facilitated workshops, led by Robertson. All meetings are scheduled for 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. in the Palmetto Room at Wando High School with the community dialogue meetings in the Wando cafeteria.

The meetings for the Steering Committee are Feb. 21, March 18, April 10 and May 8. The community meetings are March 6 and April 24.

Effective participation in this process will require a commitment from local citizens to attend the dialogue meetings and offer constructive suggestions and options. This is not a debate, rather a research project.

Letters to the Editor



Beach renourishment

If I am to understand the proposed arrangement for funding of the beach renourishment at Isle of Palms, close to \$2M is slated to come from public funds. I have only one question. If we (the public) are going to be paying out \$2M will we (the public) have unfettered and ungated access to the northern end of Wild Dunes? If the answer is 8 to 10 parking spaces it is an insult.

Seymour Rosenthal
Mount Pleasant

We need help

Let's start with the "media" who are overdoing the negative coverage of the word "recession" and enlist their help with positive suggestions to raise consumer confidence and eliminate the current economic slowdown.

We also need Congress to act now to address the problem by making the "Bush" tax cuts permanent thus restoring our confidence in them. Also, Congress needs to cut spending and stop using borrowed money to finance their excesses like the \$17 billion spent for "earmarks."

Time is of the essence so that these actions benefit the American people and they don't get lost in partisan bickering just prior to the November elections.

Phil Siegrist
Mount Pleasant

Sailing

I don't usually do this, but I thought I would write to you to let you know that I'm interested in having you open a discussion about the possibility of having a Youth Sailing Center in Mount Pleasant. I've heard that we were going to create one near the new Ravenel Bridge but that might not be happening now. I don't know about all the politics (actually, yours is the only paper I read), but it would be great if you could cover this debate in a large sense.

I work with East Cooper youth in many different settings and I think it would be a wonderful idea to have the Community Sailing Center. Any time we, as a community, open opportunities to young people, it's win-win for everyone. In this day and age of running

here and there plugging into our "technology," we tend to disconnect further from each other. What a great thing we could do by giving our community the option to "unplug" and actually "plug" into the water and fresh air. We live in a great area, let's promote it.

Kimberly Heck
Mount Pleasant

South Carolina will place ads inside school buses

The online magazine The Consumerist reports that South Carolina will begin placing advertisements inside school buses. That's right, it's not enough your kids get sold on TV, in sports stadiums and sometimes even in their school gymnasiums. Now ads will begin appearing on a school bus near you. South Carolina will begin selling 11-inch strips above the windows in public school buses. Interested school districts get about \$2,100 per month per bus.

The South Carolina Board of Education approved the plan last month, and appears to be moving forward with it. Donald Tutor, South Carolina's DOE School Transportation director is quoted as saying he, "never thought [advertising inside school buses] was a good idea to start with, but when you run a state program and districts request this be set in motion, you do it so they can make a choice. Ultimately, I couldn't think of a good reason why they shouldn't have the option."

For its part, SAC promises the ads will be age-appropriate, promote a healthy and productive life, and are directly approved by district appointed-personnel. Ads sold thus far are from local businesses across the state. This seems inevitable, and we have to keep the school districts accountable — meaning, keep them at their word for advertisements that support a healthy lifestyle. They aren't putting ads up in buses because they are corporate shills. It's because they don't have money. With schools now pulling soda out of cafeterias, they have to compensate for that revenue somewhere else. But let's make sure our kids aren't looking at cheeseburger commercials on the way home from school, ok?

Louis Yuhasz
Louieskids.org
Sullivan's Island

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Editor, Moultrie News
P.O. Box 279
Sullivan's Island, S.C. 29482
Fax: 849-0214
editor@moultrienews.com

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