

Dear Norwood School Board and Interim Superintendent Bissell,

When our first son was born 8 years ago, we honored his arrival by planting an apple tree in our orchard. This tree was grafted from Wright's Mesa heritage rootstock, hearty and resilient. As we dug the hole, my husband commented "The best time to plant a tree was yesterday, but at least we are taking the time to do it today". After years of tending to this tree, watering deep, and providing fertile soil, it bore fruit this summer. The apples are sweet and nourishing. I believe this tree is symbolic of how we might approach sustaining our civic infrastructure.

It is important to recognize that investing in our community does not come without a hefty cost. We have some big tax increase proposals on the ballot this November. We are being asked to sustain our Fire Protection and Emergency Response in ballot measure 7a and help fund new school facilities through 5b. If passed, these ballot measures will absolutely affect property owners, and I do not take these tax burdens lightly. Food, insurance, childcare, gas, utilities, and cost of living are all going up. Life is expensive and making ends meet can be a struggle. Even in the face of these clear challenges, it is our duty to uphold and restore the foundations that support our community. What we invest in today will have a direct impact on what flourishes in the future.

If we commit to investing in our school by voting yes for the 5b bond proposal, we will give Norwood Public Schools the chance to qualify for the Building Excellent Schools Today ("BEST") grant. If awarded, this grant would fund 85% of the total cost of the projected \$68 million dollar project. With a bond request of \$10 million dollars, local taxpayers would cover 14.32% of the total project cost. The bonding capacity will increase each year, making this the right time to secure the bond. We have an opportunity to come together and qualify for state funds that will build a school that lasts for generations. If we seize this moment, we can develop a comprehensive plan for our schools, as a community.

Proposition 5B has raised concerns among citizens who feel that a clear, detailed plan accompanying the bond measure is lacking. Many have questioned the future of the current school facilities and how they will be managed. A \$10 million bond is a significant investment for a small, rural community, and residents want assurances that their contributions will be responsibly and effectively utilized.

At this pivotal moment, we must ask ourselves: Are we prepared to actively engage in enhancing the educational environment within our school system? Are we committed to participating in the planning process, working toward effective solutions, and bringing a vibrant school to life? Are we willing to invest in the future of a flourishing economy? I think the answer is yes. Our rural community stands at a crossroads, and the decisions we make now will undoubtedly shape what lies ahead. We can wait for tomorrow to sustain our civic infrastructure, but this procrastination may come with consequences.

Not only do the students, teachers, and staff deserve to learn and work in a safe and healthy facility, but our economic future hinges on the wellbeing of our school system. Strong schools reflect the stability of our society; when school systems flourish so do the businesses, non-profits, and community services. At this moment we have a unique opportunity to enhance Norwood Schools and leverage available state funding. Like planting fruit trees, there is no time like today to say yes to investing in the nourishment and vitality of our community.

-Galena Gleason

Norwood