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VIA e-mail and Federal Express

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RE: Wheatland School Proposal

Dear Members of the School Board,

We represent the Wheatland Alliance in their opposition to the need, cost, expense, purpose and siting of the so-called Wheatland School proposal.

While we believe that the public hearings and community discussions should have sufficiently informed your discretion that this is an inappropriate allocation of public resources, we are writing to underscore several concerns that have gone somewhat unappreciated - if the remarks reported in the local press

fairly reflect the views of the public officials who have this matter under consideration.

The reported remarks suggest that our concerns are more narrow than they really are. This opposition to Wheatland is not just about the inflated price to be paid for the land, the questionable source of sufficient water and waste disposal, or about the preservation of an historic treasure, although these are significant and essential concerns that might be worthy reasons, in and of themselves, to reject this proposal.

Our concerns may be difficult to rank but among our most significant concern is the questionable need for these proposed mega-schools in a declining real estate market when home sales are suffering.

We are told that the “need” is premised upon County forecasts. But we really can’t base the decision to build schools in Loudoun County on out-of-date forecasts that presumed population growth and home sales that have gone unrealized. The planned student population of 4,000 for this project is more than the current total population of the nearest three towns (Lovettsville, Hillsboro, and Hamilton) combined! This means the area population would have to more than triple over current levels to need this additional level of school seats, which is implausible within the 8 year timeframe staff claim. We need current studies with adjusted forecasting assumptions that match the current economic realities. Otherwise, we are flying blind as to both timing and magnitude of the need.

While we are always concerned about the cost of land and capital to the County and its taxpayers, the seller’s abrupt willingness to drop his sales price significantly, by 23% (about \$14,531.00 less an acre), proves our case that the current real estate market doesn’t justify the value that the County first pledged to purchase the property.

If the County is going to speculate on land, then it has to be smarter about how to bargain with our taxpayer dollars when arriving at a price, and how to use our reduced resources best. In a flat market, we should be getting a better price that we did here. More generally, we are of the view that the County has no business in land speculation. At least one School Board Member agrees and has publicly stated his disapproval of banking land for future needs particularly when there are competing projects elsewhere in the County with more pressing build-out deadlines. Speculating at all, and doing so improvidently, is a prescription for bad public policy, and it really has to be a lesson learned from the Wheatland proposal.

Furthermore, we strongly believe that compliance with the spirit of the Comprehensive Plan is essential in siting schools, i.e. that building community-

based schools is integral to their mission. We also believe that many options exist for school sites that comply with the plan and are likely to be served with central utilities.

We don't pretend that ascertaining the need for schools and then siting them is an uncomplicated process, especially when there are issues about available water supply (aquifers or water towers), waste disposal, traffic congestion, historic preservation and open spaces, but the issue is only further compounded when the deliberation process is conducted, shall we say, "under the radar," and then presented as a *fait accompli* to the public.

The friends and neighbors of the Wheatland Alliance stand ready to assist the School Board, the Board of Supervisors and any other County agency in the deliberative process by which we make decisions about the need and siting of schools.

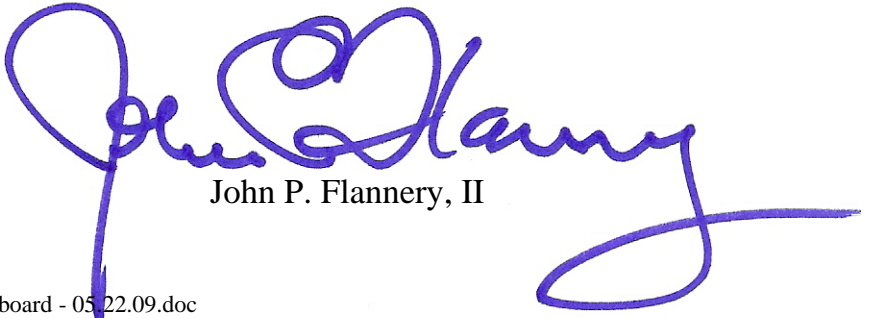
We hope and expect that next time we will be involved sooner rather than later in a more transparent process so that we may inform the discretion of the governing bodies with our reservations and recommendations.

As for the pending project, we hope and trust that you agree now, having had a chance to review how we got to this point, that this Wheatland project is fatally flawed.

For these reasons, and the many comments you've heard from the community, from other elected representatives, and from our community papers, we respectfully insist that the Board and County go back to the blackboard and start this school assignment from scratch – as that's where we really are - so that we may get it right the next time.

Thank you very much for your time and kind attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,



John P. Flannery, II

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