

Guest Editorial

By MISSY HARRIS

Dear Galion,

There is so much that could, should, and will be said about the matter of the divisive issue of the former Galion High School. You, my fellow townspeople, deserve to know more than the "spin" that you may read in school board press releases and newsletters. I do not underestimate your ability to understand that there is much more to the issue than the school board is willing to admit.

So I will tell you a little about what I have witnessed in this debacle — and inform you that further, commentary will soon be posted on www.1917ghs.cpm. In my statements, I write as a private citizen of Galion, Ohio, U.S.A, and not as a representative of any group, though I proudly admit to being a member of the "re-use group."

A year ago, I got involved with this project, which seemed straightforwardly good for our community: an effort to develop plans to re-use our former high school building for a virtually limitless array of beneficial uses. In this short time that has passed, I have watched, horrified and disheartened, as every effort of the re-use group to meet the demands of the school board was met with contempt, or else categorically dismissed. Their behavior smugly smacks of their assumptions of sovereignty; it seems that democracy is failing in Galion.

The facts of the matter include, but are certainly not limited to:

1) The board completely disregarded a petition signed by more people (over 1,400 signatures were obtained) in support of saving the school, than the number of individual voters who elected each incumbent school board member at the polls last November.

2) The board has implied (if not stated) that business plans that were submitted by the re-use group were inadequate. It should be noted that the access to the former high school that was provided for the purposes of gaining renovation quotes was actually a charade — it was a heavily-

chaperoned, speedy walk-through that left the contractors (the two who were able to accommodate the time dictated by the school board for the walk-through) with too little information to provide quotes.

3) The school board broke the law by violating city statute "R.C. 3313.35: Legal adviser of boards of education," which maintains that school board members are required to use the services of the city attorney when citizens of the town file claims against them for abusing/misusing their power (rather than retain private counsel at taxpayer expense, as the Galion board has done in this case).

4) The charges against the board were dropped NOT because they were innocent or "winning," but because the \$21,000 plus price tag (\$15,000 remains after the generous contributions of Galion High School's oldest living alumnus, Ralph Cobey) of holding them accountable was getting to be too much for the private citizens who were brave enough to put themselves in the spotlight as whistleblowers and become plaintiffs.

5) The board never bothered to find out how much any of the abandoned schools were worth as buildings — they always, only thought of the sites as empty land, to be sold for development after destroying the buildings. And they've never said why.

6) The board chose to refuse cash offers for the land, electing instead to use our tax dollars to pay for demolition of a school that maybe a majority wanted saved. [We'll never know if a vote could have saved the school and developed it as a community asset; my requests to put the issue to ballot were ignored. And let's all NEVER forget one board member's benchmark comment: "If we let them vote on this, when will the voting stop?"]

7) The board really doesn't know if there is any environmental risk due to the demolition of a building that stands over a former cemetery (that is arguably still a

cemetery), and they are following the minimum precautions that EPA standards allow them to follow.

8) The board has alliances with many powerful private citizens in town. If you pay attention, you'll start to notice patterns in name associations and things those people have in common. Let's suffice it to say that some non-elected citizens have a lot of influence over the decision-making processes of the Galion board of education.

Again, there is so much more that bears stating, and I'm not talking about the "spin" put out by the school board office. People of Galion, ask questions. Do your own research on this. Call and/or e-mail the school board and ask them for real numbers and real answers — don't let them dodge this and pretend they've done nothing wrong. Ask them how they reached their decisions and ask them to show you (and explain to you if necessary) where our money goes; you are entitled to know!

Long live free speech and democracy. Let's stand up for ourselves, people, and not let our so-called leaders walk all over our best interests. I urge you all to educate yourselves. Before you vote (on anything, including the upcoming school levy), make sure you know what your elected officials are up to — don't just believe them when they tell you (and I'm paraphrasing): "We've got it all under control. We know what's best, and that's all we have to tell you. Now shut up and go away, please." Don't forget: This is America. We are the people. They are supposed to work for us.