

We asked Willie Cowgur, the school board member who proposed new district spending for a football stadium at Bentonville West High School, to respond to a few questions regarding his proposal and its last-minute addition to the board's July 17 meeting agenda. Here are his responses:

Why did you decide this needs to be an agenda add on?

The board of education didn't have a pre-agenda meeting in July. Those meetings typically serve as an opportunity for board members to modify an agenda. Since that opportunity didn't present this month, I didn't have another option but to present my motion when I did. This was the right time to do so in light of the property sale on Bright Road which was on the agenda. I'm also cognizant of how much time it's going to take to finish our work at Bentonville West High School. This project is 70 percent complete. I want to see our board finish that work for students.

Why is funding the stadium this way the right approach?

The district has tried private fundraising for almost a year with little success. The facility needs to be completed for all our students at West, not just those who play football. This project will benefit students in a number of programs: band, soccer, track, our spirit squads, lacrosse, and our football student-athletes. Our students matter to this board and it became evident the project might never be completed without our support.

There was another option discussed at one time: neutralizing Tiger Stadium and making it a shared facility. We looked closely at that prospect and learned it would cost about \$1 million dollars to do so. For me, the question became do we spend one million and tear apart two communities or do we spend \$1.9 million to help each school preserve its own identity?

Why should the public not view it with some disappointment based on the fact the proposal was not made until after the millage election and amid past concerns with funding the stadium?

I understand the questions, but let's look at the facts. The property on Bright Road was put on the market April 17, 2017. We had no idea when that parcel might sell or for how much. This property sale came about after the millage vote. We petitioned the people of Bentonville to help build four new schools and that hasn't changed.

We know, as a board, sometimes we're put in a decision to make unpopular decisions and that's okay. More than anything, we have the best interest of our students at heart. This wasn't easy for a couple of board members, whom I respect very much, but I know this is the right decision for Bentonville Schools. I would also remind voters this is simply an unfinished project just as if their school had an unfinished parking lot, playground or bathrooms, they would expect the project to be finished. One final note: This allocation doesn't finish the work. I know the

district is back at it, working to secure private gifts to get the job done but now they have a little more momentum going their way.

The stadium proposal doesn't use millage money, but should people not view it skeptically that this plan wasn't revealed to them during the millage.

Like I wrote, there was no plan. The district team was working and continues to seek private donations. After the district firmed up its 10-year strategy, the administration could clearly identify where excess unusable land existed. This was a portion of land that couldn't be developed for our purposes. The traffic congestion is tough in that area and we weren't sure how to add another school without taxing our infrastructure. I hope I can help Bentonville voters to understand this was unexpected money not budgeted. That means other improvement projects, staff pay raises and new building projects, remain unaffected.

Bentonville is who I am. My family is from Bentonville and we love this city. I want to serve this community and serve it well. This wasn't a snap decision. I know we did the right thing and I'll continue to support the completion of the project. We've been talking about this since last August so it's not a new topic. It's a tough one but this board cares tremendously about our students and staff. I always ask myself, "Is this right for students?" before I cast my vote. The answer, in this situation, was a resounding yes.