

Carole D'Elia
Little Hoover Commission
925 I, Street, Suite 805
Sacramento, Ca. 95814

August 24, 2016

Dear Ms. D'Elia:

I read with great interest the letter sent to Mr. Anton Jungherr by the LHC. I wish to provide written testimony for your meeting scheduled for September 22, 2016.

I served on the West Contra Costa County Unified School District's Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee from June 2010 to June 2016.
I served as Chair of the WCCUSD CBOC from February 2013 to January 2016.

I initially served on the committee as the appointee of a WCCUSD Trustee, Mr. Antonio Medrano.
At the time I was the President of the Pinole Chamber of Commerce and actively involved in my community.
I admit that I had no background in this area; my career was spent in the Alternative Finance Industry as VP of Operations.
But as a product of the New York City Public School System, I believe in Public Education and I was very aware of the difficulties our school district faced.
It was my naïve belief that I could help improve our schools by serving on the CBOC.

I learned rather quickly that the committee was merely serving as a "cheer leader" for the District and its Bond Program.
What I did not learn quickly was just how mired in ineptitude, secrecy and politics the Bond Program was.

After sitting through three years of two-hour monthly meetings that were dominated by photos of the projects, reports that backed-up those photos and little discussion regarding budgets or costs, I was frankly, ready to throw in the towel.

Members of the Committee did not appear to know what was occurring, frankly neither did I. If we were to believe what we were hearing everything was absolutely wonderful.
Many members did not attend on a regular basis and we had problems reaching a quorum. Most members had little or no knowledge of the nuts and bolts of the Program. How can you ask questions if you don't know what to ask?
Many were there to bolster their resumes, protect their company affiliations, their specific schools, or their constituents.

There was a lot of yelling and screaming between political adversaries and a total

lack of protocol.
But I hung in there.

In 2013 after we had gone through several Chairs and no one wanted to serve in that capacity, I, very reluctantly, agreed to serve as Chair with the caveat that the committee understand that I was dealing with family health issues that took me to the East Coast on almost a regular basis. It was better than not having a Chair at all. Fortunately, I had a Secretary and Vice-Chair who helped me plan meetings while I was out of town, and I was at least able to show up for meetings. Most of 2013 was a blur for me.

But once my family crisis ended, my mother passed away, I realized that my background in management and organization would not allow me to lead this committee as Chair, without completely transforming it.
And thus I set out to make some very big changes.

My challenges were many.
The State Legislature had not done the taxpayers any favors when they created the Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee in 2000 under Prop 39.

A CBOC can meet as infrequently as once a year.
The same District that they are tasked with overseeing, appoints them.
There are not allocated or budgeted resources for training.
The District is under no obligation to provide timely data or to respond to inquiries within a specific timeframe.
The CBOC is charged with actively reviewing, reporting and informing the community on the expenditures of those bonds funds, but only after the fact.
We are powerless to effect changes.
Our only real tool is the media.

The CBOC must rely on the District it is overseeing to provide the information it needs to make informed decisions. But, the District controls the information and when or if we receive it.

Members are selected and appointed, not based on their expertise or background, but by criteria developed by the Board.
The Board has the final say as to who sits on the Committee.

I, of course could not affect the selection process, but I could work to ensure that the CBOC was operating efficiently, effectively and getting the information and cooperation it needed from the District. I could also enforce the absentee policy so that we had members working as a team and improve our productivity.

I addressed the lack of organization, lack of protocol, and absenteeism and implemented changes.
I sought to improve the website and make it relevant and a source of public

information.

I challenged the District to provide us with support, training, information and resources.

I publicly requested resources and enhanced communication, responsiveness and cooperation from the District at Board meetings.

I told the Board that it should not be necessary for the CBOC to have to go through an obstacle course or arm-wrestle them for information.

There was a perceptible change in attitude by the District late in 2013 and into 2014 - 2015.

The shift in attitude was due to several significant developments that helped to spur the District's increased cooperation.

In February 2014, then Associate Superintendent, Bill Fay, responded to the CBOC's questions regarding budgets, by stating that the WCCUSD Bond Program was a scope driven program, not a budget driven program.

It was a jaw-dropping revelation.

In May 2014 the CBOC agenda was altered without my approval or consent by staff in order to include a Debt Limit Waiver on the agenda, and thus check off that box on their application.

We call that the "Mad as Hell" meeting.

The media was there and captured the frustration of the CBOC. It led to a shakeup of staff.

In June 2014 voters rejected the seventh Bond Measure, the first Bond Measure to be rejected for the WCCUSD Bond Program.

2015 marked a change in the District's attitude and tone.

Why?

1. Because, the District was assailed by the press.
2. Because, there were ongoing IRS and SEC investigations.
3. Because voters rejected the seventh Bond Measure.
4. Because, Dennis Clay, WCCUSD analyst, made serious allegations about Program mismanagement.

This has led to a forensic investigation into the Bond Program; the final report is due on September 9. I am a member of the Clay Investigation Sub-Committee.

5. Because the Contra Costa County 2015 Grand Jury Report, "A Case Study in Stymied Oversight" detailed the CBOC's frustration with the District.
6. Because the CBOC pressured the District to be open, transparent, cooperative and collaborative.
7. Because the public began to question how their Bond money was being spent.

There had been questions raised about the size and effectiveness of the CBOC.

The effectiveness of the CBOC is in direct relation to the lack of authority the CBOC has, and the fact that they are completely controlled by the District they are

overseeing.

The District's fall back position is to quote the exact language of Prop 39 and the role of the CBOC, and to cite their lack of resources for the work of the CBOC.

The CBOC is still fighting an uphill battle to get the type of reports and data it needs to not only be able ask relevant questions, but to properly prepare to ask relevant questions.

As I told then Superintendent Bruce Harter when discussing training for the CBOC, "they don't know what they don't know".

Get the community more involved, provide the CBOC with resources, data, true support and elevate and enhance the CBOC's abilities and resources.

I certainly hope the LHC can effect real changes through the State Legislature that will ensure that the work of the CBOC is taken seriously and supported.

I sincerely hope that the recommendations made by LHC in 2009 are not simply filed away for another seven years, but implemented.

Sincerely,

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