

# Bond Talk—*Shaken, Not Stirred*

by [Michael G. Maness](#) ~ [Tyler County Booster](#) (June 10, 2021), 5A.

Woodville ISD Superintendent Lisa Meysembourg invited the community to join a new District Facilities Task Force on Monday evening, May 24, at the elementary school cafeteria.

The purpose was to seek help in developing a “plan for improvements, renovations, and/or new construction.”

Bond talk—shaken, not stirred.

Meysembourg hopes to “shaken” interest in assessing needs.

In her kindly presentation, she outlined the school’s comprehensive and diverse work. Unlike the James Bond movies where subterfuge and spy games float amid conspiracies, she is approaching this with several “stirrings” already afoot.

Just a few years ago, the WISD Board passed a bond vote that was met with serious opposition. I knew the superintendent and all the board members, and none intended subterfuge. However, when the bond vote was presented, it seemed like a secret coup to many. The reality was the board did what they thought best, and it did not dawn on many that the board meetings are public. The rest is hearsay.

I might have been in the minority at the meeting, for I did not anticipate a bond stirring.

However, at the close of the meeting, Kendall Coleman waved to his right at Brenda Maloy and to his left at Eleanor Holderman, each a few seats away, and said, “If anyone can get it done, these two ladies can.” Both are retired teachers and long-time supporters of WISD.

Someone mentioned a bond.

It became clear that there were several already rooting for improvements, which meant another bond deal. Maloy was a board member for over 15 years. Holderman was a part of the elite 50-plus-year graduate enclave from Kirby HS, whose annual reunion—perhaps the only one in country—celebrates the 50th year from graduation of that class. Over 200 come! Only the 1970 class could not be invited in 2020 because of killer Secret Agent Corona.

I mentioned that several would not be interested in another bond stirring.

From behind me, Rochelle Springfield asked, “Do they know the need?”

“No,” I said, “I doubt they do.” And I did not either.

From the start, Meysembourg welcomed all and asked questions. What do you like about WISD? What are the needs? What vision do you have for WISD? As she outlined the WISD’s work in its 344-square-mile tax base, she asked questions. When she finished, she asked more questions.

Get it? To “shaken” interest, ask. Want to know the need—come.

CFO Cody Jarrott gave an overview of the finances. The bond on the Eagle Stadium and Summit included HVAC for the Middle School Gym and a road, and it was paid off last year. So the school is bond debt free.

When the bond for the stadium was passed, some stirred then, too. But these years later, it is a source of pride and joy, and the old thing a piece of shame. Old misgivings are so deeply



buried few can conceive of not having the stadium. And the eagle statue on the west side was donated by one of the elite 50-year Kirby HS classes.

Jarrott also said the school budget devotes about 75 percent to salaries, and in an interview after the meeting, he pointed out that the audit requirement was 75–85 percent of the school’s budget are required to go to salaries. The school develops its budget from taxes and from state funding, and there is never enough from that to do a significant build. Said in another way, any significant change from the 75–85-percent mark, and the assassins from Austin will be spying out Woodville for targeting practice.

Just awhile back, the school paid \$110k for two 48-ton A/C units to keep the Kirby Gym operable. Those are the kind of expenses the remaining 25–15 percent covers along with the water and light bill and host of other things. A new building would also not have any major issues for a couple of decades and facilitate much better today’s technology. That was not discussed at the meeting, but those are topics Meyssembourg is asking the community to weigh.

Bond talk—she is trying to shaken interest in need assessment. She wants to hear from people, all people, including those not interested in a bond. What is the need?

What will it cost? Many are depressed already.

Googling the average interest rate for a school bond in Texas turned up 1.7 to 1.9 percent.

So, I emailed Tyler County Chief Appraiser David Luther and asked about the cost of a 1.9 percent bond for \$10m, \$50m, and \$100m for homes valued at \$100k and \$500k, and then for a 10-, 15-, and 20-year bond. Could he give those?

Into this stirring, Luther himself has not been the most popular person. Most of us were miffed by the rapidly rising property valuations and higher taxes. Not a few got angry, so much so, that for a time the Appraisal Office had a Woodville Police Officer stationed there just in case someone’s protest went Hillbilly.

Loved Luther’s response: there were a lot “missing and moving part,” so come “see me.”

On Saturday of Memorial Day Weekend—he was working then, too—I met him for an hour and left with 30 pages of data. And convicted that his was another job I would not want.

The simple answer is that a 10-year \$10m bond would cost a \$100k home valued at \$75k (with the \$25k deduction) would be about 10 or 11 cents per \$100, or about \$75 per year on top one’s regular school tax.

That did not appear to be a big deal.

Yet, there are a lot of “moving parts.” Among them, that 10-cent cost depends upon Texas helping with about half. Luther mentioned that most of the time the state helps with a bond, if the school qualifies. So, if—“if”—the state did not contribute, then the cost for \$100k home would jump to at least 20 cents per \$100, or to about \$150 per year.

Into this stirring, comes good news, for the tax is frozen for homeowners over 65. Any bond issue will not affect them. If that homeowner added a \$30k garage or workshop, then only that portion would become subject to an adjustment to their frozen school tax plus their share of the new bond tax; when added to the previous freeze, a new freeze goes into effect.

Bond talk—shaken, not stirred, and there are more issues afoot.

Jarrott mentioned and Luther reiterated that “the more the property rises in value the less the school gets.” That sounds odd. Yet Texas has placed a cap on how much the school can take from taxes, and beyond a certain point they must share with other poorer districts. For instance, tiny Evadale ISD’s few square miles of tax base yields a huge return from the paper

mill, and so they historically have had to give a portion of their taxes to poorer school districts.

Luther and Jarrott are in constant communication. Jarrott keeps a close eye on several things and especially school attendance that affect what the state gives to WISD. Any of the moving parts can significantly change the school revenue, and then budget adjustments. Other good news included WISD's solvency with enough in the bank to meet emergencies.

Three important parts to state funding include: (1) ADA—Average Daily Attendance, not enrollment; (2) local tax effort; and (3) State Comptroller's assigned property value. As few as five students not attending makes a difference. If the school does its part on proper tax assessment, that is, setting the tax rate appropriate for the district's demographic, then the school gets some guarantees from that. Kind of like, said Luther, "If you collect a \$1, I'll give you \$1.50." If the Tax Appraiser's valuation is too low, the Texas Comptroller will use its own valuation. Lot of moving parts.

WISD's tax base valuation is about twice that of Warren and nearly three times that of Spurger, Colmesneil, and Chester. WISD's huge 344 square miles has a valuation of about \$1.5B. Yet, Luther must deduct a host of items. The HS itself, all the churches, and the hospital are valued at about \$365M. He must deduct timber losses of over \$32M. And he deducts the balance from the over-65 frozen valuation increases, and the total of the disabled vets and the disabled deductions.

Shaken down, the WISD tax base to about \$723M.

Most of that comes from the 137k acres of open land valued at \$372M, the 4,444 single-family homes at \$297M, 32k acres of rural land at \$189M, 12,613 oil and gas accounts at \$122M, and 41 manufacturing entities at \$54M, just to name a few. And, oh, did you know that Luther must also appraise and tax the tables and chairs at Wild Bill's Grill, and other restaurants—lot more moving parts.

Jarrott has his hands full managing a fluctuating budget influx.

Should a bond be shaken down, you can bet that Meysembourg, Jarrott, and Luther will be doing all that they can do to qualify for matching state funds, though, again, that is not guaranteed. What is certain is that the invite is out—come, see, share.

Over 100 were invited, and about 55 came. WISD wants the community's input. If you want to be on the list for the upcoming meetings where experts will testify, email [Lisa.M@WoodvilleEagles.org](mailto:Lisa.M@WoodvilleEagles.org). Mark your calendar, for the architect that completed the recent facility audit will explain all at the next Task Force meeting on Tuesday evening, 6 p.m., June 22, in the elementary cafeteria.

Meysembourg hopes to shaken interest in need assessment, and, given the previous bond boondoggle and flurry of tax fires—in typical James Bond savoir faire—she wants to assassinate any stirrings from fantastical conspiracy theories.

Bond talk—shaken, not stirred!

