

## **Recall attempt fails – Chris Jackett – C&G**

### ***Bloomfield 20/20 falls short of signature requirement to remove BHS board members***

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The Bloomfield Hills Schools' Board of Education isn't going anywhere.

The Bloomfield 20/20 recall petitions that have been circulating since July 11 for some board members and July 15 for others failed to collect enough signatures by the recent 90-day deadline. In a Dec. 29 email to district residents, B20/20's Chris Fellin acknowledged the failure, but said his grassroots group will continue to oppose the high school consolidation in preparation for a potential bond item in May, August or November 2012.

"Led by Bloomfield 20/20, volunteers collected thousands of signatures over a 120-day window, but not enough as required within a 90-day window," Fellin said in the email. "Signed petitions continue to come in. Petition volunteers learned a lot of people were surprised the combined high school plan was still alive."

B20/20 needed to collect 5,266 signatures on each board member's petition within 90 days. That originally equaled 36,862 total signatures needed by the 90-day deadline of Oct. 13 from residents of Bloomfield Township, Bloomfield Hills, West Bloomfield, Troy and Orchard Lake to recall all seven board members. In a follow-up email Dec. 30, Fellin said he would "not be releasing final tallies" for the number of signatures collected, which will not be finalized for several weeks.

"I do not have final tallies since I stopped counting when I knew we were not going to be able squeeze them all into a 90-day window," Fellin said via email. "I'll know final counts when we add them to our database, which won't be until late January."

When former Secretary Kate Pettersen resigned Oct. 20 because she was moving to Colorado and success at the Oct. 13 deadline seemed unlikely, B20/20 hit the reset button on the recall signature collection, extending the deadline to Jan. 12 within a 90-day window. However, since the 90-day window requirement was not met, Fellin said he would not submit the existing petitions in order to protect resident privacy.

Trustee Robert Herner and newly appointed Secretary Joan Berndt were not included in the latest recall attempt, but the group failed to collect the remaining 26,330 signatures needed for President Ingrid Day, Vice President Ed Ford, Treasurer Cynthia von Oeyen, and trustees Jacqueline El-Sayed and Mark Bank.

"I'm disappointed that people felt that strongly disagreeable with the board members in the first place," Day said. "The people sitting at the table have been elected. The community wants good dialogue, good discussion as a whole."

The recalls, submitted by B20/20 member Dan McClorey, stated the board members "did not act in the best interest of the students nor the district taxpayers when (they)

voted yes” to a variety of items. Included among those issues was the authorization for Fielding Nair International to “proceed with development of a plan to combine Bloomfield Hills Lahser and Andover onto the Andover site,” as well as contracts made with SHW architects, Barton Malow and FNI for “facilitation, planning and design consulting for combining the high schools.”

“We’ve given the community many different ways to fix it, and maybe that’s all the community needed to see,” said Day, who acknowledged B20/20’s stance on not attending community outreach gatherings. “It’s unfortunate because we want everybody there. When FNI came on board, we spent a lot of time with the people who had issues with us.”

The FNI contract cost the district \$863,000. B20/20 felt it was not in line with the failed November 2010 ballot item for a \$97.5 million 100 percent new high school at the current Andover site. McClorey did not respond to messages seeking comment.

“I implore you to pay close attention to what the board is saying and what they aren’t saying,” Fellin said via email. “Their information/propaganda blitz has already begun, and behind the scenes the architectural and construction management firms they have hired will support this bond campaign as well. These firms have a lot of money riding on bond passage.”

FNI presented an 85 percent schematic design Oct. 18 for the 331,200-square-foot Andover space that would be 64 percent new. A final decision from the board is expected Feb. 16, and a bond to help pay for a portion of the \$65 million-\$85 million project could appear on a May ballot.

“I encourage you to be prepared to vote against this bond proposal in a likely ‘stealth’ May or August election,” Fellin said via email. “A November election ensures the highest turnout and delivers the only valid voice of district residents on such an important issue as a bond proposal.”

BHS Superintendent Rob Glass said Dec. 15 that a May 2012 ballot would be necessary in order to begin work on the project in 2012, or else the unified high school would not be ready as planned for student use in fall 2015.

A November 2012 ballot would delay construction until spring 2013, just a few months before Andover and Lahser will consolidate at the administrative level despite continuing to operate on two campuses; a measure slated to save the district \$500,000-\$750,000 annually.

“Because we scheduled both high schools together, that’s the only way we can have that full offering of courses in the course book,” Day said. “Most places that offer our course offerings have 2,000 kids.”

A successful bond would save the district about \$2 million-\$2.5 million per year, but at the \$65 million-\$85 million cost of reconstructing and adding onto the existing Andover facility.

A failed bond would still cost the district about \$30 million for necessary repairs and updates at both Andover and Lahser, as well as continual maintenance at the two buildings, which currently do not meet enrollment capacity and risk cutting academic and athletic programs due to low participation.

“The real core issue hasn’t gone away. At the end of the day, we have the need to fix our physical assets,” Day said. “Much like our consolidation to the Doyle Center, it’s a necessary thing, it’s a good thing, it can save us money. We just want to keep this ball rolling. Regardless of when the election happens, we just want to put this to bed.”