

## FINAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING DEC 2, 2009 10 AM VIRGINIA MN

On Wednesday we met with the members of the school board at the district offices in Virginia. Attending were Superintendent Dr. Charles Rick , Bob Larson (Board Chairman), Darrell Bjerklie (Cherry board member) , and Andy Larson.

We talked about a plan to try and keep Tower-Soudan a 7-12 for at least 5 years to make a smooth transition to charter. As expected they cannot make any legal agreements that are binding but said it will be giving 2 years to get a charter school up and running as is. They also were interested in exploring with the charter school members a type of “Hybrid” Charter if anyone was interested in which they could share 7-12 classes from 2142. They said it’s never been tried before and were interested in trying something like that. They could also add a few ITV rooms/ computer lab where the fitness center is planned to be built to help in this Hybrid model or other uses. Otherwise, they stated their full support of a charter school in Tower-Soudan. They also offered possibly hosting the charter in the upstairs of the new remodeled school. They also reassured that to their best ability that the K-6 is solid and will not be removed for any reason but couldn’t speak for new board members if they should come along. Finally, they reiterated that if the bond referendum fails, Tower-Soudan will have no school.

The board also promised that right after the Yes vote they will begin work on what they described as “Phase 2” which includes working with Ely. They also feel that if this passes they may be able to approach the citizens of Ely to possibly lower their taxes while working with the IRRRB to help with paying their large debt and be able to offer them a new 7-12 shared school with Tower-Soudan. They stated that this could all occur within 5 years but again it will be up to Ely and stated they would be meeting with them early and often. They stated that It could be paid for by a special bonding referendum that needs only a vote from the school board and not the public. They reassured to the best of their ability they would get the board votes needed for that new Ely/ Tower school. They mentioned that they just cant speak for new board members should they come along.

Here were the main points that were reviewed with the school board one last time to remind them of why we CANNOT LOSE our school in Tower-Soudan. The information above in no way reflects my personal opinion. It is only a report of what was discussed during this meeting last Wednesday and their responses.

## **WHY TOWER NEEDS A K-12 FOR THE FUTURE**

- Tower has the largest projected population growth north of Duluth excluding Hermantown at 8.4% to 2017 according to Johnson Controls.
- Mesabi Nugget and Polymet Mining will be bringing an additional 600-1000 good paying fulltime jobs to the local area and those families will need places to live and attend school. There will also be many more spin off jobs created to service those facilities and their families.
- Tower has the largest projected student increase in the entire district to 2017 excluding most of these reasons on this list (Johnson Control).

- Tower-Soudan are the largest taxpayers in the district
- Tower begins construction on a new 8 million dollar harbor project that begins construction in the spring of 2010 allowing the only direct access to Lake Vermilion ( the 4<sup>th</sup> largest lake in the state ) to downtown Tower and all of the new development that will develop around it.
- Approx. 60 families are currently on a waiting list to move into the new fully funded housing development at Bois Forte in Tower and will need a local school. In the current district plan they are being forced to travel approx 50 miles a day instead of only 10 that they currently have.
- Tower-Soudan has the largest concentrated population in the district at approx 2000. No population of that size has ever had their school closed in the state of Minnesota.
- The Lake Vermilion State Park project is being worked on again which could bring a projected 400,000 additional tourists a year to the area according to its planners. If not, 150-300 lots are going to be developed. In either case it will increase our need for services, support and a school.
- Tower is centrally located in the center of Virginia, Ely, Babbitt, and Cook.
- The day after a yes vote the remaining Tower K-6 will be the largest liability in the district. As soon as the district spends 120 million dollars on new and remodeled schools for everyone else in the district they will most likely need a new operating levy within 3-5 years which will most likely fail. They will than look to cut costs and see that the remaining Tower K-6 spends more than it makes because it has thrown out its 7-12 graders to other districts years before.

And finally, Tower-Soudan is the oldest city north of Duluth and the birthplace of Minnesota mining with a rich and wonderful history with a very bright future! Destroying our town by closing our school is not an option and shouldn't be acceptable.