

August 24, 2023

Mr. Jeff Powell
Superintendent
Rapides Parish School Board
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Dr. Stephen Chapman
Board President
Rapides Parish School Board
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REQUEST FOR INFORMATION AND CONSIDERATION REGARDING PROPOSED WINDOW REPLACEMENT AT BOLTON HIGH SCHOOL

Dear Mr. Powell and Dr. Chapman:

The undersigned write to you as business owners, taxpayers, parents, educators, preservationists, and community leaders. We are advocates for modern, functional school infrastructure that serves students' needs, and we believe this goal can be achieved in harmony with the preservation of our historic structures if appropriate consideration is applied. Our immediate concern is the recent disclosure of the proposal to utilize funds from the District 62 Bond (the "Bond" or "Bond Funds," as contextually appropriate) for the replacement of windows at Bolton High School. We appreciate that the Board, along with its construction and design partners, has worked diligently for the last four years to involve the public in discussions related to the Bond; however, given that the proposed window project at Bolton did not appear in publicly-available materials before June of this year, and that the character of a wholesale window replacement on a historic structure must be considered beyond the scope of "miscellaneous renovations," we consider our inquiry timely and respectfully ask that it be given attention appropriate to its gravity.

While Bolton holds a special place in the hearts and minds of many as an educational *institution*, Bolton High School as a *structure* possesses a unique character among RPSB facilities. No other building in the district holds the independent architectural significance of Bolton, and perhaps no other is as emblematic of the success or failure of its surrounding community. The district holds both the honor and the burden of being the ultimate custodian of the architectural integrity that underpins those defining traits. We feel that this matter has broader implications for the stewardship of our community's historical legacy, as well as for maintenance of the public trust in the Board's ability to demonstrate its transparency and responsiveness. It is our intent to articulate why we believe any alterations should be made with a deep appreciation for the historical context and architectural significance that this school represents.

Bolton High School is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (as its adjacent neighborhood, the Alexandria Garden District) specifically for its Neoclassical architectural style. The National Register listing describes Bolton High School as "the most urbane and

sophisticated early twentieth-century building in the parish.” Of the many architectural elements that define Bolton, windows are the most numerous and hold the most significant architectural weight. They play a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and authenticity of the school’s architectural character, and they were also originally designed to achieve the functional aim of providing cross-ventilation to a structure that was built before modern air conditioning was available. Maintenance and repair of original architectural features is a regular task for all owners of historic structures, and custodians of National Register-listed buildings must take extra care to ensure their repairs do not adversely affect their building’s original style, materials, and detailing. Complete replacement with modern materials is well-documented as a last resort among preservationists and architects who emphasize that unsympathetic alterations can result in the loss of a building’s National Register listing. A decision to replace Bolton’s windows would be effectively irreversible, and thus all appropriate prudence must be brought to bear.

Given the foregoing concerns, we respectfully request that the following information be made available for public consideration:

1. **Reasons for Window Replacement:** Please provide a detailed explanation of why the windows at Bolton High School are slated for replacement, including any structural or safety concerns, along with the assessment documenting the current condition of each window upon which project administrators have relied.
2. **Types of Windows:** Please provide information about the types of windows being considered for use in replacement, including manufacturer, profiles, measurements, and examples of other historic properties where these windows have been installed.
3. **Alternative Considerations:** What repair and restoration options were explored as alternatives to replacement?
4. **Proposed Costs:** What is the estimated cost for the proposed window replacement, and what, if any, projects on the original slate of Bond items will be supplanted if the proposal is carried out? What is the alternative estimated cost of repair for windows that require it?
5. **Other Relevant Details:** We further request any additional details regarding this proposal or any other that may impact the architectural or historical integrity of Bolton High School.

As this project is not scheduled to be placed for bids for several more weeks, we kindly ask that no final decisions or commitments be made until all interested parties have had ample opportunity to review and comment on the above-listed deliverables.

Transparency and community representation are essential in ensuring that the use of Bond Funds aligns with the public’s interest and the preservation of our historic structures. To that end we further request a meeting between the signatories to this letter and the appropriate RPSB and Bond project decisionmakers within the next ten business days to review the requested materials and to discuss how our respective groups might work together to advance our common interest in the responsible stewardship of Bolton High School.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your dedication to maintaining the historical and architectural legacy of our community. We look forward to receiving the requested information and participating in a constructive dialogue about the future of Bolton High School.

Sincerely,

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Cc:

all Rapides Parish School Board Members via email