

Board of Education Speech, June 13, 2023

I'm Reed Sutman, reporting for DecaturVote.com, where a full report and documents will be published by Friday.

Kent Metzger received a \$19,000 proposal from BFW engineering on March 23rd to inspect Dennis & French. Denise Swarhout claimed on May 31st that May 30th "was the first availability on [BFW's] schedule." On April 11, Metzger tells BFW that April 19th will work. On April 27th BFW replies asking for a new date, and Metzger suggests "an afternoon next week". On May 15, BFW suggests that week or the following week, but Metzger delays until May 30. On May 26, Metzger informs BFW that his "maintenance foreman and mason are knowledgeable about some structural issues." The public was first informed on May 31.

On May 31st, Denise Swarhout tells WCIA Journalist O'Hara "We're not available for on-camera interviews at this time, the statement is all the information we have to share." WCIA reports on June 9th that School Board Vice President Jason Dion said "he can't comment or give details on the situation"

The District's statement says that the HLS surveys "did not reveal the current structural issues that have been recently identified," which is true. However, the report details at least 9 cases of water leaks or damage at the Dennis building, a hole in a masonry wall, a deteriorated masonry joint sealant, and that many doors did not fit properly.

The final report released today cites 3 cases of likely previous repairs at the French building. At the Dennis Building, there was previously inspected softening of the basement foundation, not likely related to the north stair, and at least three previous repair attempts involving the north stair, as well as a door that had been cut to allow it to swing open, needed because the stairs had shifted so much.

There is a clear record of known issues, a clear record of previous repairs, emails and public statements showing avoidance of reporters' questions, a lack of transparency throughout this process, and a deflection from the community's concerns about transparency.

It is not my job to take a position on this issue. Rather, I am reporting the facts, that the District has not been transparent, has avoided addressing the lack of transparency, and has proposed no policy solutions that would ensure transparency in the future. Additionally, the District has made several unclear, vague, or misleading statements.

Additionally, Klinger & Associates has made various detailed recommendations for repairs, and does not clearly recommend demolition of the buildings.

For my full report, please visit DecaturVote.com or follow Decatur Vote on Facebook, and look for an article by Friday.