

New Lawton TIF Concerns Cache School District

Chad Hance

In my role as Superintendent, one of my key responsibilities is to make certain our district is financially secure and able to educate a growing population. Recently, the City of Lawton began the process to enact a new Tax Increment Financing (TIF). A TIF is a method used to take funds from a dedicated source and divert the money for a new purpose. At their latest meeting, the Lawton City Council authorized a 25-year TIF on land that is in the City of Lawton, but also in the School District of Cache.

Therefore, ad valorem funds (taxes collected based on the value of property) which would normally go to our district may now be diverted to the City of Lawton if the TIF is completed. This could handicap our district's ability to fund growth. Unfortunately, it appears Mayor Booker is not concerned about the impact on our school district, but I am.

Traditionally, Oklahoma law promotes the use of sales tax as the way to fund city government. Ad valorem taxes, on the other hand, is the method to fund schools, career tech centers, county government, and county services. TIFs are new to our state and not all are created the same. Typically, stakeholders impacted by a TIF work together to find a compromise to benefit all stakeholders. Most recently, this was the case in Jenks, Shawnee, and Stillwater, where the city and school work together to ensure the TIF was financially feasible to all parties. In the new Lawton TIF proposal, Mayor Booker has shown little interest in working with me to find a plan which supports his goals and lessens the negative impact on our district.

As I am interested in economic development in the area, I want to find compromise just like what has been done in the other communities across the state. I have reached out to state leaders, private attorneys, and other municipal leaders who have dealt with TIFs to see what can be done to ensure Cache Public Schools' interests are protected. To date, I have not received positive news. When a city in a neighboring community can impact the funding of a school district not in their city, there is no incentive politically to compromise, which creates bad public policy. Today, Cache is being impacted but tomorrow it could be another small community school.

My intention with this letter is to inform stakeholders of the current situation impacting Cache Public Schools. This TIF will be in place for 25 years. If successful, Lawton will see an increase in economic growth and population. I hope this occurs, but I also believe the schools are an important part of attracting businesses and families. We will be impacted as the funding created from growth is diverted to the City of Lawton from Cache Schools. Not one of us knows what will happen in our area over the next 25 years, but I believe it is safe to assume our district will continue to grow. The financial burden will be challenging.

We have a great school. We want to be good neighbors, and I personally want to see the City of Lawton prosper. I am even supportive of policies which can help attract businesses to our area. I hoped Mayor Booker shared a desire to consider the concerns raised before proceeding. Unfortunately, my concerns are being ignored. At this point, we are at the mercy of the City Council of Lawton. There will be a TIF

Review Committee meeting Friday October 25th at 10 am and another on Wednesday October 30th at 10am at Lawton City Hall, where I will be in attendance. Before the final step of the TIF passage process, there must be a public hearing where I can, once again, voice concerns. My hope is that these can be addressed and a compromise found.

Please consider getting involved and attending either meeting on October 25th or 30th. Consider contacting the City of Lawton councilmen or Mayor Booker to share these concerns. I am willing to meet, so that together, we can make sure the City of Lawton and Cache Schools can support a plan that works for both communities and benefits all of us in the greater Lawton area.