

By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican Co-Publisher

It's the issue that can't get resolved and just won't go away. That's right—the height of poles on the football field lights. While it may seem like a trivial subject for a squabble, it's sure turned into that and much more.

There's a much better way of describing the kind of “match” going on here between the involved parties, but I'll leave that up to you to fill in the assumption.

If we could only go back and play the what-if game, life could move on. What if the football field would have been put in the southwest corner instead of the northeast corner? What if the right mapping information would have been used or proper protocol followed to find out there was a problem BEFORE the lights were ever put up. What if? What if?

That's all conjecture now as we try to find a solution to get the new football field complex lit so it can be used this season.

The crux of the problem is that the height of three of the four light poles erected at the field violated local airport zoning regulations. When it came to the attention of the airport zoning board, they demanded the poles come down and the school finally complied.

That's when the finger pointing and hand wringing began. It was the engineer's fault. It was the school's fault. It was the airport zoning board's fault. Turn in any direction and it was somebody else's fault.

Last November, after a contentious discussion between airport zoning officials and the school board and its administrator, it looked like the school would comply with the zoning regulations.

However, afterwards, the school received information from a patron who believed a higher pole height was possible. It just so happened this patron was also on the zoning board, but was not acting as a member of the board but as a patron and taxpayer.

Later, the patron/board member learned his information was incorrect. Any violation of the airport zoning regs was not an option and it was a mistake to advise otherwise.

Since then, members of the airport zoning board, who have basically had their fill of the situation, have taken the stance that they will only approve pole heights that conform with the local airport zoning regs.

Despite being aware of this stance, Superintendent Matt Fisher and the school board continue to make requests they know won't be approved so they can take the issue to the next level—the city variance board. (How would you like to have this issue dropped in your lap?) Court action is another possibility as the school has hired an attorney to advise them on the situation.

But do you realize who are the big losers in this “match”? It's the kids who want to play football on that field this year and the community that supports this school!

It's not about blame or pointing fingers anymore. It's about finding a solution that puts this issue behind us and gets our kids on the new football field this coming season.

Based on the school's action and the bureaucracy involved in considering their requests, I figure there's only a slim chance that we will be playing football (during the night, anyway) on our new field this year. Frankly folks, that's just not right!

So how is the community hurt, you say? Well, it's the people of the community who have paid for this facility and pay for the salaries of those responsible for its oversight through our annual tax bill. We're certainly not getting what we paid for!

School officials and board members who say how bad it will look to have football lights that are not all the same height haven't checked the current field. Take a drive by the east side of the field and you will see that the height of lights on three of the four poles are different.

Funny! No one has seemed to notice that in the last 10 or 20 years to my recollection. Why is it such a big deal now?

Well, everyone will notice, people say. Darn right they will! After all the fussing and fighting that's gone on over our lights, people in state and federal agencies sure notice. And so can anyone who reads this newspaper. Are we the laughingstock? Perhaps.

It's time for this deadlock to end. It's time for the entire school board to take a stand on this issue and get it resolved now. Trusting the issue to its administration has only made matters much worse.

Some battles are worth fighting and some aren't. For the school, this battle wasn't worth fighting a long time ago. Now's the time to get this issue straightened out. If that means adding an extra light pole, do it. It will likely cost less than the time and money that has already been expended to get us to this point—nowhere.

The kids and the community deserve to have this issue settled and put behind us so we can look forward to utilizing a facility that is indeed a shining asset to our school and community.