

Hindsight is 20/20:

But how good is the foresight of some members of the board of education?

District Attorney General Russell Johnson's decision not to investigate the possibility of wrongdoing in the Loudon County Board of Education's purchase of property shows real courage on the part of Johnson not to get caught up in what he called "witch hunts or wild goose chases."

Certain members of the board, specifically Van Shaver, had requested Johnson and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation look into the possibility that the land purchase could have been handled inappropriately or even illegally.

The school board purchased the land along Highway 321 in 2006 for \$2.2 million. It was later discovered that the property's previous owner, Richard Eisenbach, a Knoxville-based developer, made a hefty profit on the land after having owned it for a very short time, and had retained certain portions of the property that were more valuable — 22 acres of road frontage. The portion owned by the school board has since lost some of its value.

In Johnson's report he states, "With all due respect, I do not want to continue to waste the time and effort of TBI or my office investigators on matters that may be perceived as proverbial 'witch hunts or wild goose chases' to try and find something that does not exist just to bring about unnecessary political embarrassment for a previous board or school official(s)."

His findings go on to say it isn't criminal behavior that led to the seemingly-unwise purchase, but a bad economy and failing real estate market. The members of the school board acted on information they had at the time to secure a piece of property that met their needs, and though it may not have been financially sound, there's no evidence a crime was involved. Some members of the board who were part of the 2006 process have voiced that they have no objections to an investigation because they have nothing to hide.

Johnson's decision not to investigate ultimately saves tax-payer money and keeps government officials from being tied-up in a case that will probably do no

more than merely embarrass those who were involved. It is not the TBI's job to look into bad business practices that are not illegal, and it would be irresponsible of the state agency to waste financial and other resources to do so.

Those members of the board who are worried about the amount of money that may have been wasted on the purchase, should applaud Johnson for denying their request. His actions will keep the county from spending even more on this issue without offering any real solutions to the problem.

Whether or not this land deal was bad for the community has not yet been fully realized. Regardless of past events, it is important that the school board look ahead to try and find a solution rather than fruitlessly focusing their attentions on errors that may have been made at the time of the purchase. What's done is done.

Pointing out mistakes that were made can be helpful in determining a path for the future, but an investigation by the TBI or the district attorney general does not appear to be necessary in this case, unless more evidence appears.

Whenever criminal behavior or political corruption arise, authorities need to be notified and the appropriate investigations and proceedings need to take place, and if evidence of those types arise in the future, the appropriate measures will be taken. Johnson has said he is willing to discuss opening an investigation with the TBI if more information is presented, however, the type of information that would deem an investigation necessary doesn't appear to exist.

As things stand today, the school board members would be better advised to spend their time determining a future for the property, rather than calling for an attack on the people who made decisions regarding the land.

Thankfully, Johnson recognized the frivolous nature of the school board's request and acted appropriately and in the best interests of the citizens of Loudon County. Now we ask members of the school board and Loudon County Commission to do the same.