

## GRANT APPLICATION NARRATIVE

Applicant: Bunker Hill Community Unit School District #8

Project Title: Meissner School Revitalization: From Historic Resilience to Future Innovation

Site Address: 504 East Warren Street, Bunker Hill, IL 62014

### **1. PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION AND PLANS FOR REVITALIZATION**

#### a. Target Area and Brownfields

Bunker Hill, Illinois, located in Macoupin County, is a community defined by resilience. The target area for this Multipurpose Grant is the historic Meissner Elementary School site at 504 East Warren Street. Constructed in 1929, the Meissner School has stood as a central pillar of our community for nearly a century. Its walls have witnessed generations of students and stood firm through the town's most defining historical event: the devastating tornado of 1948.

When the 1948 tornado leveled much of Bunker Hill, destroying homes and businesses and reshaping our landscape, the Meissner School survived. It stood as a beacon of hope and continuity—a testament to the strength of our infrastructure and our people. However, what the fierce winds of 1948 could not destroy, time, economic hardship, and environmental hazards have slowly eroded. Abruptly vacated in 2009 due to structural needs and a failed referendum, the building has sat empty for over 15 years. Today, this once-proud survivor has become a significant liability. The structure is deteriorating, with compromised roofing, floors, and ceilings. More critically, it is a repository for hazardous materials. A 2024 NESHAP inspection by Farmer Environmental Services identified extensive Regulated Asbestos-Containing Material (RACM) throughout the facility, including pipe joint insulation, floor tiles, and window glazing. Additionally, significant moisture infiltration has led to widespread mold growth. The site, once a symbol of survival, is now a dangerous brownfield located in a residential neighborhood, posing a safety hazard to the district and the community due to vandalism and environmental exposure risks.

#### b. Revitalization of the Target Area

The revitalization plan for the Meissner site, located 20 miles from the now-closed former Shay Coal Mine, is transformative. The current blighted Bunker Hill CUSD #8 proposes to use EPA Multipurpose Grant funds to complete the necessary environmental assessment, asbestos abatement, and demolition of the hazardous 1929 and 1950 structures. This cleanup is the critical "unlocking" step required to proceed to our next phase: the construction of the Meissner Early Childhood Center (MECC).

The proposed MECC is not just a replacement school; it is an innovative, 10,000-square-foot facility designed to address two critical regional crises simultaneously: the shortage of high-quality early childhood education and the shortage of educators. In addition, the facility will provide the only full day Birth to 3 program in the area, along with providing child care that allows for 3 and 4 year olds to seamlessly move between a day care and a classroom setting without having to be transported between facilities. The new facility will feature:

- **Educational Spaces:** Classrooms for birth-to-3-year-olds and Pre-K students, designed with age-appropriate, inspiring interiors.
- **Community Integration:** A large multi-purpose room for student and community use, secure playgrounds, and a "lighthouse" model for education.
- **Career Pathways:** A unique partnership with high schools in Macoupin and Montgomery counties to provide clinical experiences for students interested in teaching careers, creating a pipeline of future educators, courtesy of the local community college partner, Lewis & Clark Community College.

In addition, a long-vacant lot connected to this property will be converted to the playground area for the Early Childhood Center. However, a large portion of the 7.43 acres will remain a community green recreational space, sorely lacking in the mile-long blighted TIF district.

### c. Strategy for Leveraging Resources

This Brownfield grant is the keystone of our funding strategy. The District has already invested in preliminary architectural planning and environmental assessments (Woolpert and Farmer Environmental). The EPA funds will clear the site, making it "shovel-ready" for construction. This cleanup will leverage the subsequent capital campaign and potential state construction grants needed to build the MECC. The reuse plan is highly feasible, as the site is already owned by the District, zoned for educational use, and serviced by existing infrastructure (water, sewer, electric) which will be upgraded for the new facility. Currently, the District has submitted the construction of the MECC facility with the IL Capital Development Board for 96% funding from the state of Illinois. Currently, the IL Capital Development Board has approximately \$47 million remaining in this construction fund that will soon be distributed to "Round 2" awardees, which Bunker Hill CUSD #8 is in the queue.

## 2. COMMUNITY NEED AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### a. Community Need

Bunker Hill is a remote, rural community facing significant economic hurdles. Due to its status as a PTELL (tax-capped) entity since 1997, the District does not have the bonding capacity or capital reserves to address a project of this magnitude without federal assistance. Additionally, the community lost its only pharmacy two years ago, and its sole grocery store closed in early 2026 (just a few weeks ago). The increasing rate of rural poverty has now qualified the school district for the CEP (Community Eligibility Provision) granting all students in the school district free breakfast and lunch

access. Complicating funding matters is the loss of blue-collar jobs (closing of the Shay coal mine, closing of Georgia Pacific plant, and Alton Steel) resulting in far less local property tax wealth in addition to reduced local economic activity. As the building continues to deteriorate rapidly, the risk to residents increases exponentially. After numerous break-ins and attempts at vandalism, as well as a breeding ground for infestations of raccoons and vermin, broken windows and doors continue to be barricaded, preventing further entry to this hazardous structure.

While not enough for the correlation to be identified as causal, Macoupin County, Illinois currently has the fifth-highest age-adjusted incidence rate of cancer of Illinois' 102 counties according to data from the CDC and NIH State Cancer Profiles for 2023. According to that, the average age-adjusted incidence rate of cases per 100,000 in the United States hovered at 7.6 cases, with Illinois slightly higher at 7.9 cases per 100,000. Macoupin County Illinois logged 12.5 cases per 100,000 with 65.5% of these cases classified as "late stage." This prevalence of poor health, along with the lack of access to basic healthcare and groceries, combined with the financially limited school district paints a picture of overall low community health. Hope is still the top predictor of success in resilient rural communities, and the safe abatement and demolition (followed by the eventual construction of a state-of-the-art Early Childhood & Childcare Center) would inject much-needed hope into this rural community.

- **Health & Safety:** The current site is an attractive nuisance. Despite attempts to secure the building, trespassers frequently vandalize the property. This activity risks disturbing friable asbestos—confirmed by Farmer Environmental to include 13% asbestos-containing materials (ACM) pipe insulation and 20% ACM chalkboard materials—releasing fibers into the air in a residential zone. The presence of mold further exacerbates respiratory risks.
- **Educational Gap:** Our current K-8 facility, Wolf Ridge Education Center, is at capacity and cannot accommodate the expanding needs of early learners. Without the MECC, our youngest residents lack access to critical early development programs, and our high school students miss out on vocational training in education. Families in the immediate area also lack access to quality childcare due to waiting lists at day cares in surrounding communities, despite a spatial barrier due to geographic distance.

This early childhood center would also house the district's Early Childhood/Pre-K classrooms. Currently, the district has the only inclusive blended Early Childhood/Pre-K classrooms in southern Macoupin County area. This increase of space and programming will allow to service more children under the age of 5 with disabilities within their home community.

## b. Community Engagement

The District is committed to transparency. We have held programming meetings with District administration and stakeholders as well as the City of Bunker Hill, the Illinois Department of Early Childhood, the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and all state and Federal

legislators (IL Rep. Davidsmeier, IL Sen. Tracy, Congresswoman Budzinski, Sen. Durbin and Sen. Duckworth) to develop the MECC concept and secure outside funding for the project. As we move into the cleanup phase, we will:

1. **Host Town Halls:** To present the Farmer Environmental findings and the abatement schedule, ensuring neighbors understand the safety protocols being implemented. Joint meetings have already been held with the Bunker Hill Board of Education and the City of Bunker Hill regarding the utilization of \$50,000 in local funds.
2. **Public Repository:** Maintain a copy of the grant, the Farmer Report, and the Analysis of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives at the District office for public review.
3. **Regular Updates:** Utilize the District's website and social media to provide progress reports on the demolition and subsequent construction, celebrating the transition from blight to a community asset. Drones will be utilized to provide semi-weekly updates to the community via the district website and social media accounts. The District also publishes a magazine 3x per year mailed to every boxholder within the boundaries, reaching nearly 2000 households. Updates including the initial grant award, will be featured prominently in upcoming issues. Finally, the district enjoys positive relationships with local press media, including the Alton Telegraph and the Riverbender.com news site, along with the statewide Illinois educational leadership magazine Leadership Matters, all of which would be willing to amplify this story to the broader community at large.

### **3. TASK DESCRIPTIONS, COST ESTIMATES, AND MEASURING PROGRESS**

#### **Task 1: Project Management and Reporting**

- **Description:** This task covers the administrative oversight of the grant. Superintendent Todd Dugan and the District's business office will oversee compliance, quarterly reporting to the EPA, and the final closeout.
- **Deliverables:** Quarterly reports, minority business enterprise/women business enterprise utilization reports, and final grant closeout.

#### **Task 2: Environmental Assessment and Planning**

- **Description:** While a National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants inspection has been completed, Multipurpose grants allow for additional assessment. We will utilize funds to finalize the Abatement Specification Plan based on the Farmer Environmental report. This includes creating the bid documents for remediation contractors and conducting air monitoring during the abatement process to ensure no asbestos fibers migrate off-site.
- **Deliverables:** Final Abatement Design Specifications, Bid Documents, Air Monitoring Reports.

#### **Task 3: Asbestos Abatement and Demolition (Cleanup)**

- **Description:** This is the core activity. Based on the Farmer Environmental report (Project No. 2411-397), the site contains 54 suspect materials that require removal before the building can be demolished.
  - **Abatement:** Licensed contractors will remove friable and non-friable ACM. Key identified hazards include:

- **Pipe Joint Insulation:** 13% ACM found throughout the gymnasium and building.
- **Floor Tiles & Mastic:** 9"x9" tiles (1.25% - 3% ACM) and mastics found in the original building, halls, and cafeteria.
- **Chalkboards:** 20% ACM content in classrooms.
- **Exterior Caulks:** Window and door caulks ranging from 2% to 10% ACM.
- **Demolition:** Following abatement, the structure will be demolished. The 1929 and 1950 building sections will be razed to clear the footprint for the new 10,000 sq. ft. MECC. Debris will be disposed of at approved landfills.
- **Deliverables:** Clean clearance reports, waste disposal manifests, site clearance certification.

**Task 4: Reuse Planning**

- **Description:** Finalizing the architectural and engineering designs for the MECC to ensure it meets the LEED "certifiable" standards as outlined in the Woolpert proposal.
- **Deliverables:** Final site plan, updated LEED scorecard.

Budget and Cost Estimates

The following budget is derived from the "Full Demolition Option" and "Renovation/Demo" estimates recommended by Farmer Environmental. The total abatement and demolition cost is estimated to exceed \$500,000.

Budget Category	Task 1: Abatement	Task 2: Demolition	Total
Federal Contribution	\$390,088	\$356,800	\$746,888
Local Contribution	\$0	\$50,000	\$50,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$390,088</b>	<b>\$356,800</b>	<b>\$796,888</b>

**4. PROGRAMMATIC CAPABILITY AND PAST PERFORMANCE**

a. Organizational Capacity

Bunker Hill CUSD #8, led by Superintendent Todd Dugan, possesses the organizational structure to manage federal grants effectively. In addition to the entitlement grants afforded the District by the US Department of Education (such as Title I and II, along with IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) funds), the District has also secured and successfully managed other competitive Federal grants, with the most recent being a Department of Justice SVPP (School Violence Prevention Program) grant of \$200,000 which was recently successfully closed out on budget and on time. The District manages an annual operating budget of \$7,000,000 and various Federal and state entitlement grants. We have retained Green Associates

(Architecture/Engineering) and Farmer Environmental (Environmental Consulting) to provide technical expertise, ensuring the project stays on schedule and within scope.

#### b. Past Performance

The District has a strong track record of successful facilities management, including the maintenance of the Wolf Ridge Education Center. While this is our first EPA Multipurpose Grant, our team has successfully managed state-level funding and is fully compliant with all reporting requirements. We have also managed ongoing Federal grants from the US Department of Education (Title I and II along with Federal special education [IDEA] funding). In addition, we recently acquired a competitive Federal grant from the US Department of Justice in 2022 for the COPS SVPP (School Violence Prevention Program) which was most recently closed out finally ahead of time and on budget. Annually, we have no adverse audit findings.

## 5. PROJECT BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES

#### a. Welfare and Public Health

Removing the asbestos and mold-ridden Meissner School eliminates a critical health risk to the community at large. The abatement will ensure that the site is safe for the construction workers who will build the MECC and the children who will eventually learn there.

#### b. Economic and Environmental Benefits

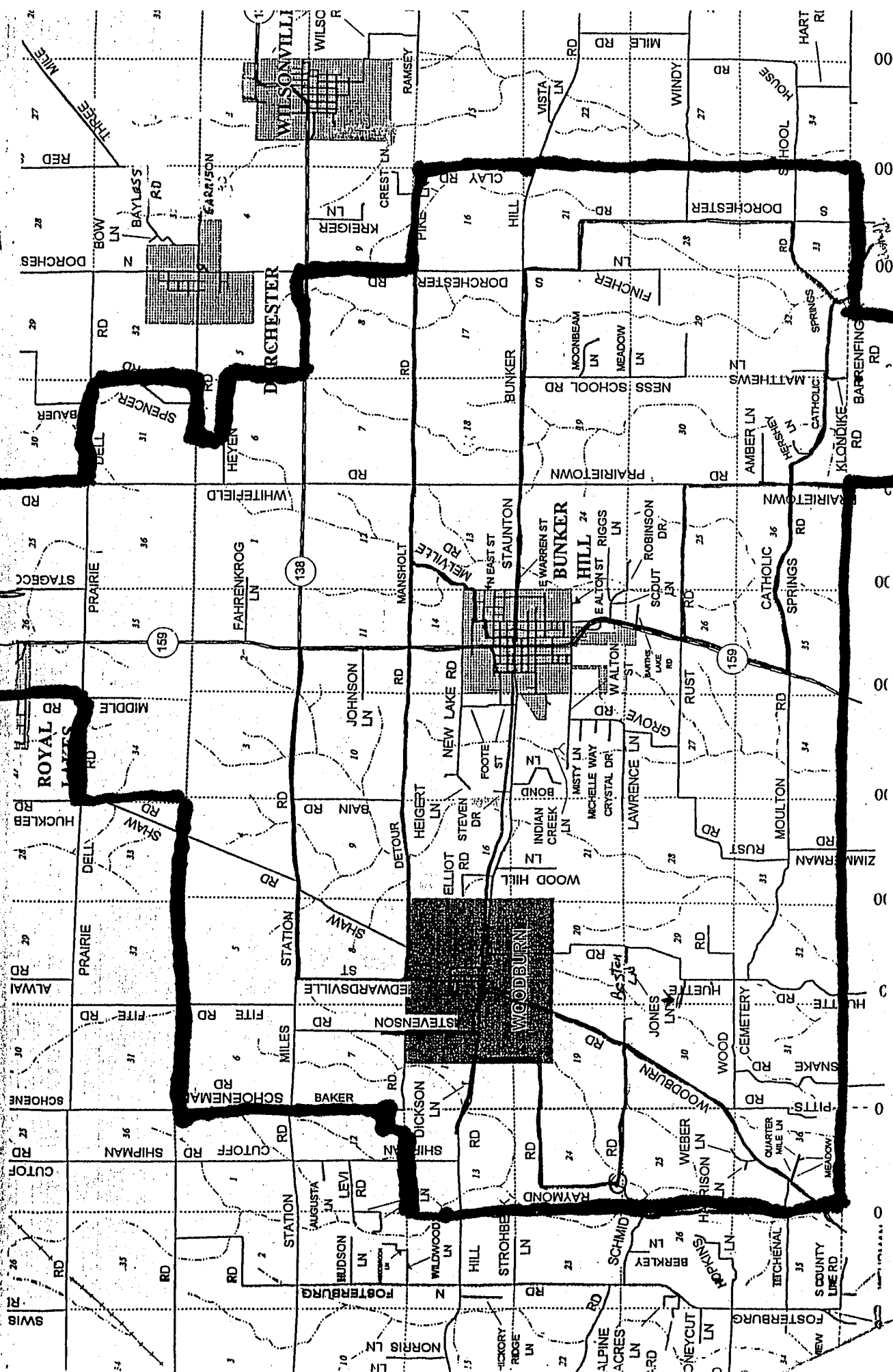
- **Green Building:** The new MECC is designed to be LEED certifiable. It will feature a high-performance building envelope heated and cooled by a state-of-the-art high-efficiency geothermal system, LED lighting integrated with daylight controls, and a minimum 10kW photovoltaic (PV) solar array on the roof.
- **Sustainable Site:** The project reuses land within the community core, utilizing existing utility infrastructure rather than developing green space.
- **Economic Growth:** By providing reliable early childhood education as well as direly needed childcare in this pre-school/childcare desert, we enable more parents in the community to enter the workforce. Furthermore, the teacher pipeline program will help secure the economic future of our high school graduates.

#### Conclusion

The Meissner School survived the 1948 tornado, standing as a testament to Bunker Hill's past. Now, with the support of the EPA Brownfield Multipurpose Grant, we can honor that legacy not by letting the building rot, but by transforming its footprint into a future-focused center for learning. This project will turn a hazardous liability into a "lighthouse" of education, innovation, and sustainability for generations to come. In short, this grant, if awarded, will serve as the catalyst upon which to build a brighter tomorrow in a much-blighted, remote rural community that certainly has seen better

days, but also sends the message that with resilience and resourcefulness comes the possibility for a brighter tomorrow. Problem + Change = Hope.

Carole



MADISON County Line



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1/27/2026

Bunker Hill CUSD #8  
ATTN: Dr. Todd Dugan  
504 E Warren Street  
Bunker Hill, IL 62014

**Subject: State Acknowledgement Letter for the Bunker Hill CUSD #8  
FY2026 US EPA Brownfield Multipurpose Grant Application**

Dear Dr. Dugan,

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Illinois EPA) has received your request for a letter of acknowledgement for an upcoming Multipurpose Grant application to U.S. EPA. The Bunker Hill CUSD #8 is applying for a \$796,888 Multipurpose Grant.

The grant will be a Multipurpose Grant for Hazardous Substances.

Illinois EPA acknowledges Bunker Hill CUSD #8's efforts to obtain federal Brownfields funds for this project. If you have any questions, I may be contacted at the above address or telephone numbers below, or at [Jacob.fink@illinois.gov](mailto:Jacob.fink@illinois.gov).

Sincerely,

Jacob Fink  
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