

Joint Quarterly Meeting with the Board of Supervisors and the School Board (Wednesday, August 2, 2023)

Northumberland County, Virginia

Members present

Richard F. Haynie, Thomas H. Tomlin, James W. Brann

Absent:

Ronald L. Jett

James M. Long

Other Staff Present:

Mr. Luttrell Tadlock, County Administrator (arrived at 6:05 p.m. due to a prior meeting)

Mr. Drew Basye, Assistant County Administrator

Ms. Morgan Wilson, Executive Assistant

Mr. Robert Headley, IT Administrator

The joint meeting with the School Board was convened by Chairman Haynie and held at the Northumberland Courthouse located at 220 Judicial Place, Heathsville, VA 22473.

1. Opening of Meeting 5:30 P.M.

The School Board Chair called the School Board meeting to order as this was a joint meeting. Attending the meeting was Betty Christopher, Gayle Sterrett, Denise Mazyck, Dr. Cheryl Davis, and Dana O'Bier.

Action, Information: A. Discussion - Joint Meeting with School Board

Superintendent Wargo presented a packet to the Board of Supervisors that provided a schedule of upcoming events between now and when school is back in session on Monday, August 14, 2023. Dr. Wargo also announced that there will be an addition of Agriculture Education classes for middle and high school students. The full update from the school can be accessed in board docs.

Dr. Wargo continued her presentation and informed the Board that the preliminary accreditation results came back for the elementary, middle, and high schools. All schools are fully accredited.

Dr. Wargo then read a letter from the School Board in response to the Board of Supervisors' request regarding the Heathsville School Board office and CIP. The School Board requested the County transfer the old EVB bank property over to the School Board, located at 6958 Northumberland Highway, Heathsville, VA. The School Board also requested for the Supervisors to cover the cost for the roof replacement with County funds prior to transferring the property and for the roof replacement to be complete by fall 2023.

The request from the Board of Supervisors was for further information related to how the new construction funds (\$1,134,172.00) will be used. The School Board met on June 22, 2023, and

prioritized the following capital improvement projects to be paid for by the new construction funds:

1. Flooring Upgrades at NES \$379,380.00
2. Replacement of the NES playground \$500,000.00
3. Repairs to the Concrete Walkways at NMS & NHS \$70,860.00
4. A Rooftop Stairway at NES \$63,756.00
5. Resurfacing the Athletic Track \$120,000.00

The five capital improvements projects listed above total \$1,133,996.00. Dr. Wargo explained that the remaining \$176.00 will be applied to other operations and maintenance projects.

Supervisor Brann asked Dr. Wargo to explain to the public what the new construction funds are.

Dr. Wargo clarified that the new construction funds are federal funds earmarked for new construction.

Mrs. O'Bier asked for an update on the old EVB roof project.

Chairman Haynie explained that the Board approved the contract and are moving forward.

Mrs. O'Bier asked what company the Board is moving forward with.

Assistant County Administrator Basye informed Mrs. O'Bier that the contractor company name is Elyon Construction, LLC.

Supervisor Tomlin explained that Elyon Construction was the low bidder and they are fully licensed.

Mrs. O'Bier asked if the Board has any idea when that project will start.

Assistant County Administrator Basye stated that staff is waiting to receive the signed contract back from the contractor before they can move forward on the actual project. He also explained that during the bidding process, it was made clear that the County was looking to have this project completed by the fall. Mr. Basye assured the School Board that staff will communicate with Dr. Wargo when they receive more information regarding the project's start date.

Mrs. Denise Mazyck presented a letter to the Board explaining that employee contracts were distributed twice this year by the Finance Department. The first round of contracts were sent out after the Board appropriated a 5% salary increase to employees who fall under the instructional category on June 22, 2023. The second round of contracts were sent out after the meeting on July 18, 2023, when the Board approved the requested transfer of funds from the instructional category into the appropriate categories to provide all school employees with the 5% raise. Mrs. Mazyck stated that all other counties have their contracts in the hands of their employees before they leave for summer break. Mrs. Mazyck continued and stated that their employees did not receive final contracts until after July 18, 2023, and this caused many disruptions. She believes

all the disruption and confusion could have been avoided if the School Board had the ability to transfer already appropriated funds between their categories.

Mrs. Denise Mazyck motioned that the Northumberland County School Board formally request the Board of Supervisors to return the ability to transfer funds between categories back into the hands of the Northumberland County School Board and Administration, as it has been for many years in the past.

Mrs. Cheryl Davis seconded this motion. The vote on the motion carried, 5-0.

Mrs. Denise Mazyck also motioned to request the Board of Supervisors to make and approve a motion tonight that returns the School Board funding to lump sum status with the ability to move appropriated funds between categories.

Mrs. Cheryl Davis seconded this motion. The vote on the motion carried, 5-0.

Supervisor Brann stated that he felt there were too many issues to be resolved so he will not vote to approve this request.

Mrs. O'Bier asked what issues need to be resolved.

Supervisor Brann stated finances, reconciliations, and questions not being answered satisfactory to the citizens.

Mrs. Sterrett stated that they've caught up with the reimbursements and monthly reconciliations.

Supervisor Brann explained that one big question that citizens want an answer to is why it costs almost \$20,000 a year to educate a child in Northumberland County.

Dr. Wargo explained that yes that is the total cost, but it's broken down into local, state, and federal dollars. Dr. Wargo stated that she'd more than happy to provide information to the Board as far as what other counties contribute, but the County does have a high local composite index which makes it more difficult.

Supervisor Brann stated he would like to form a work group to address some of the issues and concerns that are brought to the Board. Mr. Brann believes this will allow both Boards to answer the questions as best they can.

Mrs. Sterrett likes Supervisor Brann's suggestion and believes it will provide time to tackle the School Board budget prior to its approval as well as allow transparency between both boards.

Chairman Haynie agreed with Mr. Brann's suggestion and hopes this will give the Board answers. Chairman Haynie stated that Stafford County has a similar composite index as Northumberland County which determines the amount of funding the locality receives. He continued by stating that the composite index does not change the cost per student and Stafford's cost per student is near \$15,000.00. Chairman Haynie clarified that the citizens of the County

and the Board of Supervisors would like to know where that additional \$5,000.00 is going and what it is providing for the school.

Superintendent Wargo stated that she would bring comparisons of the neighboring divisions as well as others to give a good representation of this cost per pupil.

Supervisor Tomlin explained that the composite index is comprised of real estate values, sales tax, and adjusted gross income.

Motion to approve the formation of a work group/committee comprised of two Board of Supervisors, two School Board members, two citizens (one chosen by each Board), the County Administrator, and the School Superintendent.

Motion by: James W. Brann, second by: Richard F. Haynie.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Aye: Richard F. Haynie, Thomas H. Tomlin, James W. Brann

Mrs. O'Bier asked how the two citizens on the committee will be chosen.

Supervisor Brann suggested that each board choose a citizen.

Mrs. O'Bier asked if there were going to be any requirements of the citizens, for example, being a parent of a student in the school system.

Supervisor Brann stated there are no requirements of the citizen. The citizens will be whoever each Board decides. Mr. Brann stated that he sees it as all citizens pay taxes, so he doesn't want to limit the committee citizen to someone who must have interest in the school system.

Mrs. Sterrett asked who would oversee the details of the committee.

Supervisor Brann stated the meeting details should be taken care of through communications between the County Administrator and Superintendent.

Mrs. O'Bier wanted clarification on whether the work group meetings will be in addition to the joint quarterly meetings.

Supervisor Brann confirmed that the committee work sessions will be in addition to the joint quarterly meetings with the School Board.

Mrs. Cheryl Davis motioned that the Northumberland County School Board approve the creation of a joint committee comprised of two citizens, two members of the Board of Supervisors, two members of the School Board, the County Administrator, and the Superintendent to organize and proactively work together to plan through the year in the interest of transparency.

Mrs. Gayle Sterrett seconded this motion. The vote on the motion carried, 5-0.

**County Administrator Tadlock arrived to the meeting.*

Mrs. Gayle Sterrett asked if the meetings would be open or closed to the public.

Supervisor Brann suggested the meeting be open to the public. Chairman Haynie suggested having a public comment period during the committee work sessions so the public can ask questions and the members can provide answers.

Supervisor Brann believes it will be late August/early September by the time everything gets put in order for the work sessions, so he suggested having their first meeting scheduled in September.

Chairman Haynie and Chairman Christopher offered the opportunity for the public to comment.

Mrs. Shelby Brooks expressed her excitement about the formation of the work group/committee. Mrs. Brooks then stated that if they could work to get contracts distributed earlier it would be very beneficial.

Ms. Lynn Stuart stated from a citizen's point of view, the problem with the cost per pupil is that the student population continues to decrease, but the budget continues to increase. Ms. Stuart informed the Board that she has done her research and the County funds 60% of the School Board budget. It's the highest county contribution to education among Richmond, Westmoreland, and Lancaster Counties. She continues by stating that she wants to know what they are paying for and why they are paying that much for it.

Mrs. Sterrett asked Ms. Stuart if they could schedule a time to meet because she's not sure that her research is necessarily relevant to Northumberland County.

Ms. Stuart stated that her research comes from Virginia Superintendent reports and that is County data that goes to the State.

Mrs. Sterrett stated that there are interpretations of those numbers that are not relevant to this County.

Ms. Stuart stated she would be more than happy to sit down with Ms. Sterrett to discuss her research.

Mr. James Penney stated that Dr. Wargo is the source of the data because she submits a full report to the Virginia Department of Education every year. Mr. Penney explained that information is compiled on a website, open to the public, and the citizens get to compare results and it's simply not pretty.

Superintendent Wargo and Mrs. Sterrett stated that an individual meeting would be beneficial so they both can see what research they are looking at.

Mr. Maurice Johnson doesn't see the need for individual meetings because that is the purpose of the work group/committee both Boards just approved.

Supervisor Brann asked County Administrator Tadlock to give an update on the EVB roof project.

County Administrator Tadlock explained that the County Attorney has reviewed the contract and it has been forwarded to the contractor for their review.

Finance Director Booth called into the meeting via zoom and wanted to address some of the concerns related to the cost per pupil. Mrs. Booth stated that in the school year 2021-2022, the per pupil expenditure was \$17,603 and their ADM was 1176. The per pupil estimate for the 2023-2024 school year is an estimate of \$19,997, not an actual cost amount. She explained that the actual cost won't be available for another year. Mrs. Booth's best guesstimate is that the actual cost will be near \$17,800 because their ADM is still around 1200.

The School Board's Chair, Betty Christopher, adjourned to close the joint meeting.

2. Closing of Meeting

Action: A. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn.

Motion by: James W. Brann, second by: Thomas H. Tomlin.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Aye: Richard F. Haynie, Thomas H. Tomlin, James W. Brann