

Special Called Board of Supervisors Meeting (Wednesday, May 8, 2024)

Northumberland County, VA

Members Present:

James M. Long, Richard F. Haynie, James W. Brann, Chip Williams, AC Fisher, Jr.

Other Staff Present:

Mr. Luttrell Tadlock, County Administrator

Mr. Drew Basye, Assistant County Administrator

Ms. Morgan Wilson, Executive Assistant

Mr. Robert Headley, IT Administrator

Mr. Carl Hayden, IT Technician

1. Opening of Meeting

Information: A. Call to Order

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

2. Public Hearing 7:00 p.m.

Discussion, Information: A. The public hearing is being held pursuant to Section 15.2-2506 of the Code of Virginia, 1950 as amended, allowing the public to question and comment on the proposed School Board budget.

Chairman Haynie asked the Board if they had any comments before he opened the public hearing.

No comments were given by the Board.

Public Hearing Open

Mr. Maurice Johnson stated that the school budget request reflects an increase of \$1.7M in additional County funds when compared to last year's budget. In his opinion, the School Board is seeking the County to backfill the no longer available COVID monies. Mr. Johnson brought attention to a comment made by a School Board member at last year's hearing related to, "if you don't have a child in the school system, then you don't have a dog in the fight." He reminded the Board that the auditors found overspending in all the school's budget categories after a 16% increase, so to him it seems unfathomable that an additional \$1.7M has been requested this year.

Mr. Johnson stated that last year other County departments and agencies sought savings in their budget in an effort to help mitigate the potential of a 23% real-estate tax increase. Mr. Johnson concluded his comments by stating that the school should look for savings in their budget this year. He'd like to see the Board cover the teacher salary increases along with their benefits, but he doesn't want to see this budget passed as presented.

Mr. Edgar Doleman's comments were based on the General Assembly report on educational systems throughout Virginia. Mr. Doleman recommended that the school budget be tied to measurable outcomes, otherwise the County is left spending more and more money. In regard to Mr. Johnson's comment, Mr. Doleman stated that they do have a dog in the fight because they own property in the County.

Mr. Edward Rittenhouse believes the administration is unfit to be working for the school because they can't account for the money that has been given to them. He stated that proficiency and the number of students has dropped over the years, but they still want more money.

Ms. Lynn Stuart stated that the school budget continues to escalate even though the number of students continues to decrease. She believes that the School Board consumes an extraordinary amount of the County's resources. Ms. Stuart presented several graphs to the Board. The graphs consisted of the percentage of the School Board budget in comparison to every other department within the County budget, the school's total funding from 2014 through April of 2024, the decreasing school population, census data, and the generosity of the County when funding the school budget in comparison to neighboring counties. Ms. Stuart stated that the 2024-2025 request for \$16M for instruction is unjustifiable and the County cannot afford it. She continued to present charts to the Board to show the difference between allocation per student and allocation for instruction per student, showing a gap between the total allocation and the amount allocated for instruction. Ms. Stuart then presented a graph of proficiency rates for 8th grade students which reflected that the proficiency rate tremendously decreasing. Ms. Stuart's full presentation can be accessed in board docs.

Ms. Martha Williams requested support for the proposed NCPS budget which allows for a step increase of 1.25% for employees and covers the increase of health insurance. She stated that the \$1.7M increase is mostly due to the increase in the local composite index and that alone was \$1.5M. To her understanding, the general assembly has not approved a final budget, however the most recent recommendation, if approved, will bring \$500,000 or more in state revenue to the County. She stated that she is the principal at NES, and as far as the student population goes, she is having an influx of students steadily and her population is growing. She often gets requests from out of County students to come to Northumberland to learn. In addition, Ms. Williams stated that they hardly ever have any staff turnover. In relation to test scores, Ms. Williams is unaware of what the scores were 10-15 years ago, but today they are in the green. The schools

have been recovering from Covid and the only thing the school took a slight ding on was attendance, but they have been working hard to rectify that. She stated that kids are coming to school, kids are learning, children are changing, and the demands that the children need are changing. Ms. Williams closed by informing the Board that other Counties cannot fill their positions, but Northumberland isn't having that problem. She asked that the Board consider granting the step increase for the hard-working teachers as well as covering their health insurance.

Supervisor Williams asked why other students want to come to Northumberland.

Ms. Martha Williams stated because of their educational program, special educational program, and the fact that almost all teachers are certified at Northumberland. She believes that this is what parents and children are looking for.

Dr. Karen Pica listed several statistics found from documents she retrieved from the school's site, the County's site, and from the Department of Education in Virginia site. She finds it concerning that the 8th graders are not pass proficient in their scores. Dr. Pica stated that the one question that cannot be answered is how much money the school actually needs, and she believes their budget can be cut \$4-6M without touching the raise for teachers nor their medical care. Dr. Pica stated that the school has overspent, and they found the money to cover that overspending by using supplemental funds from the State and the Feds. She asked how many of those supplemental funds were supposed to be returned back to the County in the form of reimbursements. Dr. Pica believes that there needs to be better tracking of the school spending before another dime is spent on them. She continued and stated that if the teachers do not get their raise or health insurance coverage, that is not because of the Board of Supervisors. That is a School Board decision and how they choose to manage the money that they are receiving.

Ms. Shelby Brooks stated that the demands the children place on teachers today are not like they were 10-20 years ago. The things teachers face today are things she never would have dreamed of. She listed obstacles such as mental health, defiance, family issues, learning loss, learning disabilities, trauma, etc. She asked that the Board consider the children and the staff when looking at the budget. Additionally, Ms. Brooks stated that the 8th grade testing data considers "opt-out" testing students as a failure and that is why high school proficiency rates are 98-100% because students are not allowed to opt out in high school. She stated that this is their true pass rate although others do not understand that. She also informed the Board that the lower grade levels aren't allowed to retake their tests after failing, and the upper grade levels you are allowed to retest.

Supervisor Fisher asked why a parent would allow their child to opt out.

Ms. Brooks stated that parents don't think their child is ready or the students have testing anxiety.

Supervisor Fisher asked if Ms. Brooks had any percentage as to the number of students who do choose to opt out.

Ms. Brooks stated that she did not have that information but she's sure the School Board could provide those numbers if the Board were to request it.

Ms. Brooks concluded her statement by saying that the Northumberland Education Association gave gifts to the School Board members that they purchased using their own funds, so she believes there may be some confusion there because she's unfamiliar with any other gifts.

Dr. Blizzard encouraged the Board to move forward with the approval of the school budget in the best way that works for the needs of the upcoming FY25. He acknowledged that the largest part of every jurisdiction is the educational budget and the issues related to Covid affect everyone in the nation. Dr. Blizzard stated that Northumberland has a superior system and staff is making sure they're continuing to improve that. He believes that a way to improve that is by improving the retention of staff and part of that work is based on the timing of the budget which in turn approves teachers' contracts. Dr. Blizzard references state code (§15.2-2506) regarding the 7-day waiting period, however, it references §15.2-2503 as the prescribed timing and the timing is not prescribed in that statute. He asked that the Board consider expediting the budget approval process.

Supervisor Williams asked Dr. Blizzard what good it would do if the Board approved the budget at tomorrow's meeting in his opinion.

Dr. Blizzard stated that the school could give out contracts to improve retention.

Supervisor Williams asked what is stopping the contracts from being issued right now.

Dr. Blizzard stated that the contracts are pending the approval of the budget by the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Patrick O'Brien stated that he and the citizens of the County are concerned about the progress of the forensic audit. He said that at least \$9M is unaccounted for and he trusts that this will be addressed in the forensic audit. Mr. O'Brien believes the Board should not approve the budget until they receive the results of the forensic audit.

Mrs. Tara Booth informed the public that the funds go directly to the Treasurer's office and not to the school, and then the monies are appropriated for the school to spend. She stated that all the monies related to the school nutrition fund are sitting at the Treasurer's office in the bank account. Mrs. Booth concluded by stating that there is about \$12,000 in the local cafeteria fund and as that rises, the school continues to transfer monies into that account. She stated that is the only money they actually have unless other monies get approved by the Board. She believes there is a misconception on how the funding in the County works.

Chairman Haynie asked if any unexpended funds will be returned to the County this year.

Mrs. Booth stated that there could be, but right now they are monitoring their spending and right on track for where they should be. She explained that they are trying to move around monies within their budget so that the school uses all their federal funds before the county funds and because of that, there may be some unexpended monies returned to the County that were appropriated by the Board. She continued and stated that there will be no more ESSER funds in FY 25.

Dr. Dave Curran stated that he ran for School Board because he wants to work with people as well as make changes in the County and he believes in a budget that has accountability. He is looking forward to the results of the forensic audit as well because he'd like to know of any criminal activity within the County's books and he believes that person should be held accountable. Dr. Curran stated that better communication between the two Boards would solve a lot of their concerns.

Vice Chairman Brann asked if there was any code that states that the school must have a budget before issuing contracts.

Dr. Curran stated he was unsure if there was a statute.

Supervisor Fisher stated that if any fraud showed up within the audit, he'd be highly distressed. He does not expect that because he has great pride in the school system.

Mrs. Booth referenced state code § 22.1-93 which states that the governing body of a county and the governing body of a municipality shall each prepare and approve an annual budget for educational purposes by May 15 or within 30 days of the receipt by the county or municipality of the estimates of state funds, whichever shall later occur.

Public Hearing Closed

3. County Administrator Items

Action, Information: A. Sanitary District Rehabilitation Additional Manholes Quote

Mr. Tadlock made the Board aware that Mr. Woolard identified five additional manholes that need rehabilitation at the Sanitary District which were not originally identified because the plans didn't align when they went on site. The request consists of rehabilitating 48 vertical linear feet at a total cost of \$12,960. Mr. Tadlock reminded the Board that in December the Board did approve the amount provided by Prism to do what they thought were the remaining portion of manholes at that time in amount of \$78,450. If the Board decides to move forward, Mr. Tadlock stated this would be an additional \$12,960 and he believes this will finalize all the manholes.

Vice Chairman Brann asked if ARPA funding would be covering this expense.

County Administrator Tadlock stated that we would anticipate using ARPA funds because the other set of manholes is being covered by ARPA as well. The ARPA funds can cover the additional \$12,960.00, however, Mr. Tadlock informed the Board that they need to be cautious because they are still looking at the Middle/High School septic system and there may be costs possibly associated with the Sanitary District's lab upgrades.

Vice Chairman Brann asked for Mr. Tadlock to confirm that there are enough ARPA funds to cover the additional manholes.

Mr. Tadlock explained there are enough ARPA funds because the Sanitary District's lab work has not been committed yet.

Motion to approve the quote from Prism Contractors and Engineers in the amount of \$12,960.00 for 5 additional manholes to be included in the Sanitary District Rehabilitation project. This purchase will be made by utilizing the County's ARPA funds.

Motion by: James W. Brann, second by: AC Fisher, Jr.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Aye: James M. Long, Richard F. Haynie, James W. Brann, Chip Williams, AC Fisher, Jr.

Discussion: B. MOU - Local Board of Building Appeals

Mr. Tadlock explained that Northumberland is under an obligation to have a Building Appeals Board and currently, there is no Board, however, under the Code of Virginia, it does allow for a locality to have a memorandum of understanding with another locality that does have a Board of Building Appeals. Mr. Tadlock presented the Board of Supervisors with a memorandum of

understanding with Lancaster County for them to provide the services of a Board of Building Appeals for Northumberland County.

Supervisor Williams asked what the cost would be for such services from Lancaster.

Mr. Tadlock stated that he'd have to work out the details with the County Administrator in Lancaster. He's unsure if the County would be charged per meeting or per site.

Supervisor Williams asked when this Board was ever needed prior to the need at this time.

County Administrator Tadlock stated that there has been no need for this Board for as long as he's been employed with the County.

The Board asked that Mr. Tadlock get further information from Lancaster related to the cost for providing the County with the Board of Building Appeals.

Supervisor Williams asked how pressing the County issue is that needs to go before the Board of Building Appeals.

Mr. Tadlock stated that the issue needs to be heard as soon as possible.

Information: C. Engineering Firm Bid Discussion

Mr. Tadlock reminded the Board that staff submitted a request for proposals for engineering services and they need to schedule interviews. He asked if the Board had any upcoming dates in mind that they'd wish to consider to hold the interviews.

The Board agreed to start interviews on May 15, 2024 at 2:00 p.m. prior to the budget work session already scheduled on May 15, 2024 at 5:30 p.m.

4. Items Related to Closed Meeting

Action: A. Convene into Closed Meeting

Motion to Action: A. Convene into Closed Meeting: convene into closed meeting as permitted by Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(29); 29. Discussion of the award of a public contract involving the expenditure of public funds, including interviews of bidders or offerors, and discussion of the terms or scope of such contract, where discussion in an open session would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body.

Motion by: James W. Brann, second by: James M. Long.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Aye: James M. Long, Richard F. Haynie, James W. Brann, Chip Williams, AC Fisher, Jr.

Action: B. Reconvene into Open Meeting

Motion to reconvene into open session.

Motion by: James W. Brann, second by: Chip Williams.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Aye: James M. Long, Richard F. Haynie, James W. Brann, Chip Williams, AC Fisher, Jr.

Action: C. Certification of Closed Meeting

Motion that the Northumberland Board of Supervisors return to Public Meeting and certify by roll call vote that only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, and as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were heard, discussed or considered during the closed meeting.

The vote on the motion was passed by a roll call vote as follows:

Aye: Richard F. Haynie, AC Fisher, Jr., James M. Long, James W. Brann, Charles H. Williams

Motion by: James W. Brann, second by: Chip Williams.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Aye: James M. Long, Richard F. Haynie, James W. Brann, Chip Williams, AC Fisher, Jr.

Action: D. Action taken from Closed Meeting, General Reassessment of Real Estate Values RFP

Motion to enter into a contract with Pearson's Appraisal Service, Inc for the County reassessment in the amount of \$22.50 per parcel which does not include the cost for a performance bond.

Motion by: James W. Brann, second by: James M. Long.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Aye: James M. Long, Richard F. Haynie, James W. Brann, Chip Williams, AC Fisher, Jr.

5. Closing of Meeting

Action, Information: A. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn.

Motion by: James W. Brann, second by: AC Fisher, Jr.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

Aye: James M. Long, Richard F. Haynie, James W. Brann, Chip Williams, AC Fisher, Jr.