

September 30, 2004
Special Meeting with Martin County Board of Education

The Martin County Board of Commissioners met in Special Session with the Martin County Board of Education on Thursday, September 30, 2004 at 7:00 p.m. in the Board Room of the Martin County Governmental Center, 305 East Main Street, Williamston, NC.

ASSEMBLY

Chairman Elmo “Butch” Lilley, Vice Chairman C. Mort Hurst, Commissioners William H. Manson, Jr., Tommy W. Bowen and Ronnie Smith, and Clerk to the Board Linda G. Hardison were present. Interim Manager Jack Williford and County Attorney J. Melvin Bowen were absent.

Also present were members of the Martin County Board of Education: Jackie Carr; Peggy M. Wilson; Gene Scott; Dave Markel; Kenneth R. Harrell; Moses Matthews and Van Heath and Dr. Tom Daly, Superintendent.

Chairman Lilley called the meeting to order. Following the Invocation by Commissioner Manson, the Board of Education called its meeting to order.

Chairman Lilley began the discussion by stating the both Boards have a huge task before them, an opportunity to make history, and a responsibility to the citizens and students of Martin County.

QUESTIONS POSED AT TUESDAY NIGHT’S MEETING

Dr. Daly submitted the following handout with the answers to the questions posed by the Board of Commissioners at its work session on September 28th.

Question 1 – Within the last few years what are the capital projects that have been done at each school?

Attached is a chart indicating the major capital projects approved since the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year.

Capital Projects Initiated since 2000-2001 School Year

Technology Wiring Jamesville High School	2000-01	Public School Bldg Fund (.75) Local Capital Outlay (.25)	\$ 18,827
Roofing Jamesville High School (Middle School building)	2000-01	Public School Bldg Fund (.75) Local Capital Outlay (.25)	43,050
Roofing Rodgers Elementary School	2000-01	Public School Bldg Fund (.75) Local Capital Outlay (.25)	185,450

Williamston Middle School Gym	2001-02	Public School Bldg Fund (.75) Local Capital Outlay (.25)	59,212
Roofing Jamesville High School (Office/classroom building)	2002-03	Public School Bldg Fund (.75) Local Capital Outlay (.25)	226,736
Roofing East End Elementary School	2002-03	State School Bond	200,000
Roofing Williamston High School	2002-03	State School Bond	177,000
Roofing Bear Grass High School	2002-03	State School Bond	71,000
Septic Field Replacement Rodgers Elem	2002-03	State School Bond	100,000
Electrical Upgrades at Elementary Schools	2002-03	State School Bond	346,692
Cafeteria Renovation EJ Hayes	2002-03	State School Bond	220,000
		Total	\$ 1,647,967
Allocated from Public School Capital Building Fund		\$ 399,956	
Allocated from Local Capital Outlay		133,319	
Allocated from State Bond Fund		1,114,692	

Question 2 – How were the plans for the schools developed? Who was involved in the process: How was the final plan selected?

The architectural company sent a team to survey each school and evaluate the current condition of each campus, the current and projected enrollment, and the programs offered at the school. The firm was instructed to develop a plan that would not require that the school be closed for any period of time during the normal instructional year. Based on the assessment, architects developed the concept drawing for the renovations and construction at each school. The firm then met with the school principal, some staff members, and some members of the school advisory committee to share the plans at that point. The intent of the meeting was to make sure that no programs offered at the school were overlooked and to get some input into the layout that was being proposed. There was more than one option developed for the schools with new construction, but no costs were attached to any of the plans. The School Board made the final determination of which option was included in the final request.

- At Bear Grass, the group reviewing the plans selected the option with the lowest cost and fastest completion time.
- At Jamesville High, the group requested that the proposed new cafeteria be replaced by a new multipurpose room that would help with the middle school athletic program. This substitution lowered the cost of the project. The plan developed for Jamesville does require that the road between the school and the gym be closed. Relocating the construction that occupies that space is not expected to lower the cost of the project.
- At East End, the group requested a new cafeteria be built instead of the new media center. The substitution would have increased the cost. After review, the School Board kept the media center originally proposed and added less expensive renovations to the current cafeteria.

- At Rodgers School, the group requested additional classroom space needed because of the lowering of class size in grades K-3 and space needed for special services in the place of the proposed multipurpose room. The Board decided to keep the multipurpose room and add the additional classroom space. This was the only project where the cost increased.
- No changes were made at Williamston High or Roanoke High School.

Question 3 – What is the capacity at Williamston and Roanoke High Schools? How many students are at each school?

The original building capacity was listed at 800 students for each school. As program and class size requirements have changed, the capacities have been adjusted. The capacity figures the advisory group had for Roanoke High School was 725 and Williamston High School was 730. At the end of the first school month for the current year, Williamston High School had 594 students and Roanoke High had 395 students.

Question 4 – What would be the projected cost of moving all students to two high schools?

This is not the option currently under consideration by the Board of Education and no cost figures are available at this time.

Question 5 – Where did the cost for replacing Williamston Middle School come from and why is one million dollars allocated for land?

The cost estimate to replace Williamston Middle was based on the plan for Roanoke Middle School adjusted for current construction costs. The capacity for Roanoke Middle is 560 students. At the end of the first school month of the current year, Williamston Middle had 453 students. The figure of one million dollars for site selection is based on a number of variables. The School Board has already conducted a survey of available plats for construction of a middle school taking into account location in terms of the concentration of students in the attendance area, availability of water and sewer services, and soil types. The available land with water and sewer connections has a higher price. Areas outside the water and sewer district are expected to have a lower price per acre. However, there will be additional costs for water and/or sewer/septic services. In the original site survey there were a number of plots would require additional pre-construction and foundation costs due to soil type. The one million dollar figure is a best guess estimate.

Next, the Commissioners questioned the Board of Education about a timetable and setting priorities. Dr. Daly explained that the architects had presented the projects in three phases. Williamston Middle School was determined to be the first priority, with Bear Grass School and Jamesville High School completing the first phase. The projected cost of this phase is \$28 million. Commissioner Bowen stated that he did not feel that the people would approve this amount. The Board stressed that there is no need to place a bond on the ballot that the people will not pass. Commissioner Manson stated that, as a

Commissioner and a taxpayer, he could support a \$15 million bond. From the people who have spoken with him, there is not enough support for more than this to pass.

School Board Chairman Kenneth Harrell stated that the Advisory Committee represented the whole county plus two County Commissioners, and this committee felt that something had to be done to all the schools in order for a bond to pass. Commissioner Manson stated emphatically that the concept of “everyone getting a piece of the pie” is wrong. He encouraged everyone to think of the kids, the educational system and the taxpayers.

Vice Chairman Hurst asked to be excused from the meeting for a few minutes (7:25 p.m.)

Chairman Lilley asked the Board of Education to prioritize their projects. He emphasized that other funds will be coming available in the future such as hospital trust monies, Medicaid relief, and a possible additional sales tax.

Vice Chairman Hurst returned to the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Chairman Lilley stated that the \$13-14 million would build the new middle school and renovate Bear Grass and Jamesville High School. With this bond, the county would essentially end up with three “new” schools.

Vice Chairman Hurst stated that he had served on the Advisory Board because the Chairman has asked him to serve in this capacity. Commissioners should never have been asked to serve on this committee because the end results or recommendations of this committee would eventually come before the Board of Commissioners for approval. Nevertheless, the original purpose of the Advisory Committee was to determine the number of high schools. The Advisory Committee was not formed to discuss bonds. Vice Chairman Hurst also stated that some people have indicated that he and Chairman Lilley didn't give the Advisory Committee and direction. He reminded them of a speech he gave at the April 19, 2004 public meeting. He then explained that a copy of that speech was in his car and the reason he excused himself was to get a copy of the speech to remind everyone the information he shared as early as April 19th. The text of his speech follows.

“Public meetings, held before this board was formed, showed, without a doubt, that the public is for four high schools.

This board was formed to give a recommendation for 2, 3, or 4 high schools. When it looked as if our recommendation would be for 4 high schools, Dr. Daly shifted the emphasis to bonds. These bonds are based on the same studies that the public vehemently disagreed with. They felt that the figures were inflated and not what would be needed to keep all 4 schools open.

I am beginning to think that the bonds are purposely being inflated so that they will not pass. Then the school board and Dr. Daly could say that the public did not support the bonds and they do not support 4 high schools. One does not necessarily imply the other.

All of us need to realize that this is a poor county. We need to take a close look at what is necessary to keep 4 high schools open. We are using inflated figures for repairs and now we have thrown in building a new middle school. This is an unfair burden on the taxpayers to use unrealistic figures. We need to have realistic figures for repairs and additions to the 4 high schools. We need to only look at what is necessary and not at what we would like to have. I would like to have a Rolls Royce but I don't see one out there in the parking lot. If we want to build a new middle school, which we all agree that we need, maybe that needs to be in a separate bond.

We need to present a bond to the public that is realistic. The bonds we have now would probably be voted down because they are inflated with unnecessary expenditures. The public's vote would have nothing to do with their support of 4 high schools.

I am not against 4 high schools and I am not against a reasonable bond to support them. I am against the unreasonable bond being proposed here. There is a big difference between what is required and what has been recommended.”

Vice Chairman Hurst reiterated that these boards need to present a reasonable bond that is not excessive. He agreed that both boards are facing unfunded mandates from Raleigh.

Chairman Harrell stated that the county could borrow \$14 million with 20 years to pay it back, but there are schools out there that can't wait 20 years for repairs.

The Board of Commissioners assured the school board members that they have not said they won't allocate any more money for 20 years.

Commissioner Bowen stressed the other capital needs of the county while Vice Chairman Hurst reminded everyone of the increased cost of Medicaid. Vice Chairman Hurst also reminded everyone that compared to surrounding counties, Martin County gives a higher percentage of its budget to education than any county with the exception of Pitt County.

Chairman Harrell stated that \$13 million is not a realistic figure for what needs to be done.

Both boards continued this discussion for quite some time before Chairman Lilley called for a motion.

MOTION by Commissioner Bowen, SECOND by Commissioner Manson, to offer a \$15 million bond referendum for school construction and repairs. MOTION APPROVED by a unanimous vote of the Board.

Chairman Lilley thanked everyone for attending and suggested, as mentioned earlier in the meeting, that both boards try to meet at least twice a year to discuss the needs of the educational system.

With no further business to discuss, MOTION By Commissioner Manson, SECOND by Commissioner Bowen, to adjourn the County Commissioners' meeting. MOTION APPROVED by a unanimous vote of the Board.

MOTION by School Board Member Gene Scott, SECOND by School Board Member Moses Matthews, to adjourn the School Board meeting. MOTION APPROVED by a unanimous vote of the Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Elmo "Butch" Lilley, Chairman

Linda G. Hardison, Clerk to the Board