

Energy Right Presentation / Joint Quarterly Meeting with the Board of Supervisors and the School Board (Wednesday, March 1, 2023)

Northumberland County, VA

Members present:

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

Absent:

Ronald L. Jett

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. Matthew Bailey, IT Assistant

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

1. Opening of Meeting (4:00 P.M.)

To begin the meeting, Chairman Haynie requested a moment of silence for the passing of Mr. Lee Allain who served on the Economic Development Commission.

Discussion: A. Energy Right Solar Discussion

Mr. Skyler Zunk, co-founder of Energy Right, and Mr. Jacob Carasella, Director of Community Outreach for Energy Right, came to help better educate the County on clean energy. To begin their presentation, Mr. Zunk and Mr. Carasella presented some of their personal background information to the Board. Before co-founding Energy Right, Mr. Zunk worked in conservative politics as well as government services. Mr. Carasella graduated from James Madison University with a degree in political science and then served various legislative roles in the state government.

Since the creation of Energy Right, they have visited about 45 different counties across the state to engage at the ordinance level and aid counties in considering individual projects in making them the best they can be. Mr. Zunk emphasized that they are not representing any company, but they are simply representing an idea that focuses all education on making these solar projects better neighbors.

Mr. Zunk asked the Board if he could address some questions asked to Mr. Berryhill at last month's meeting on February 2, 2023, in hopes of offering a different perspective.

A question posed by the Board to Mr. Berryhill was what's the community benefit to solar and will it lower citizen's electric bill who choose to subscribe.

Mr. Zunk shared a graph showing a study that is performed every year called the Lazard levelized cost of energy. Lazard is a consulting organization who does longer-term studies such as the one presented. The study measures the cost of a unit of electricity produced, showing various amounts of energy options. The takeaway from the study is that there are billions of dollars invested in Virginia because renewable energy is the cheapest way to put a new electron onto the grid. Over the last 10 years, the cost of a unit of electricity produced by solar has decreased 90% and that is why there is so much interest in solar energy production.

To further address the question of whether it will lower electric bills, Mr. Zunk explained that citizens will not necessarily see a decrease in their bill because there really is no direct correlation, but when looking at the larger scale, solar is becoming cheaper over time.

Supervisor Brann stated, "So bottom line, citizens are not going to see a decrease in their electric bill."

Mr. Zunk stated that citizens might, or they might not.

Supervisor Brann explained that this was the statement that solar companies brought to the meetings in efforts to persuade the approval of the projects. Supervisor Brann stated that this is how solar is being pitched to our community.

Mr. Zunk agreed that solar shouldn't be pitched this way, but he brought attention to the fact that solar is the cheapest way to produce a new electron and to build a new powerplant.

Supervisor Brann agreed with that fact, but also expressed that the only people who are really going to benefit from solar are the power companies and the property owner.

Supervisor Tomlin stated that there are only two on the graph that continuously produce power (geothermal and wind). Mr. Tomlin explained that solar doesn't produce when the sun goes down, and people still must have the expensive, traditional sources to produce energy when solar is not. So, Supervisor Tomlin asked if this graph included the cost of the traditional energy sources when the others are not producing.

Mr. Zunk informed the Board that this graph does not include those additional costs. Along with this, Mr. Zunk stated that a question often asked is if solar is only profitable and feasible because of government subsidy. Mr. Zunk wanted to make the Board aware that this graph is an unsubsidized analysis.

Mr. Zunk then shared a live map that shows Virginia in a 3,146 deficit, meaning that on an hourly basis, the state of Virginia is consuming 3,146 more megawatts of electricity than the state is creating.

Supervisor Tomlin asked how often those figures fluctuate throughout the day.

Mr. Zunk confirmed that the figures fluctuate quite a bit.

Supervisor Brann asked how solar is coordinated with the comprehensive plan and asked if it went against the County's plan.

County Planner Stuart McKenzie stated that there's nothing specific that talks about solar in the County's comprehensive plan. The basic concept is to concentrate development in the villages of the County.

Supervisor Brann brought attention to another concern of the citizens which is if they were to put their house on the market, but there's a solar project next door, it would potentially lower the value of that property on the market. Mr. Brann asked who would be responsible for making up that difference in value that was affected by the solar projects.

Mr. Zunk stated that several studies have made a case that show a good project has a good buffer, has appropriate setbacks, and has zero effect on property values. Energy Right created a poll that gave options for deciding on the use of neighboring land. The options were a solar facility, a natural gas facility, a housing development, or industrial use. More than half of the results came back choosing a solar facility.

Supervisor Brann expressed that facilities are often poorly maintained once up and running and the facility changes ownership multiple times over the lifetime of the facility.

Mr. Zunk stated that they have seen a few changes in ownership, but generally, the projects end up in Dominion's portfolio and Dominion takes ownership, or they are owned and maintained by a larger energy company that will enter into a power purchase agreement. Mr. Zunk doesn't think the County will see changes in ownership several times because they haven't seen that occur in many areas.

Mr. Zunk recommends requiring strong community outreach in the County's ordinance, so everyone is aware of what is going on with the solar facility.

Mr. Zunk then showed poll results mentioned earlier that ask Virginians their choice of neighboring land use. The poll showed that 56% of Virginians want more emphasis on solar production when compared to the other options.

Supervisor Tomlin asked who would not want to have solar when compared to the other options. The other neighboring land use options should consist of land left unspoiled, farming use, or timberland.

Mr. Zunk stated that this was a good point, but the takeaway is that folks have the complete ability to do what they want on their own land.

Supervisor Tomlin expressed that a landowner does not have the absolute right to what they want with their land. Yes, they can pursue options, but they are not guaranteed that right because what they do impacts other's property rights.

Mr. Zunk agreed with Mr. Tomlin and stated that's why Energy Right prefaces the owner not adversely affecting their neighbors. Solar projects can be good neighbors and Energy Right aims to make them better. Mr. Zunk then shared another study that showed 94% of Virginians agree that landowners should be allowed to build solar projects because they have the right to decide how to use their land and clean energy benefits everyone.

Supervisor Brann asked where all the materials are going when the facility is ready to be decommissioned.

Mr. Zunk stated that he agreed with Mr. Berryhill's response to this question of the enormous business opportunity available in recycling or reselling the panels.

Supervisor Brann agreed but there has yet to be a plan created to address this issue. Along with this, Mr. Brann brought a question to the meeting that was asked by a citizen in the County that's a businessman. He asked why these companies are paying all this rent for land to construct solar facilities when it'd be much cheaper for them to purchase it. The concern is that the company does not want ownership of the property at the end of the project's life.

Mr. Zunk stated that fewer people are willing to sell their family's land than those who are willing to lease it. This gives them the ability to use their land again after decommissioning.

Chairman Haynie asked how the County can be sure that solar is the right way to go with the panels available today. Panels have improved in the last 10 years and hopefully they'll continue to improve.

Mr. Zunk stated that a lot of folks are questioning a major breakthrough in panel technology in 20 years. If it becomes more profitable to switch those panels out and put the new ones in, people might choose to do so. The panels that were created today will still produce between 90-95% of the original amount they were producing, and these would be perfect to place on homes/rooftops. Mr. Zunk explained that individuals didn't turn down buying a car 20 years ago because it only got 15 miles per gallon. Individuals upgrade when it is time to do so, and Energy Right is hopeful that technological advances continue, but they don't necessarily want to wait 20 years for those advancements to happen. Electricity still needs to be produced, so decisions need to be made.

Supervisor Tomlin presented a scenario that when it's time to decommission, let's assume there's no worry about how to recycle them. How does the County protect itself and the taxpayers from any financial implications.

Mr. Zunk stated to prevent this, the County needs a well written decommission ordinance with financial surety requirements.

Supervisor Tomlin proceeded by stating the County would receive a surety bond, but that often fails. Mr. Tomlin expressed that the state should provide the County with some type of protection if the financial side of decommissioning fails.

Mr. Zunk encouraged the Board to make use of the UVA Weldon Cooper Center as well as asking the County Attorney how to protect the County to the greatest extent.

Mr. Zunk concluded his presentation by stating that the County is with lower risk by doing nothing, but the County needs to do something and the best way to move forward is to address those concerns, protect the County sufficiently, and ask for money upfront for a decommissioning bond.

Chairman Haynie requested a short recess before the joint quarterly meeting with School Board.

2. Joint Quarterly Meeting with School Board (6:00 P.M.)

Chairman Haynie called the meeting back to order and requested a moment of silence for the passing of Mrs. Holly Swann and Mrs. Virginia McCoy, who were both a part of the Northumberland County School Division.

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, and Dana O'Bier. Dr. Cheryl Davis was unable to attend tonight's meeting.

Information: A. Discussion

To begin the joint quarterly meeting, Superintendent Wargo went through the School Division's highlights from the last week in February. The school's highlights can be accessed in board docs.

Dr. Wargo continued by presenting the 2023-2024 proposed school board budget to the Board of Supervisors. To begin the presentation, Dr. Wargo read the budget transmittal letter aloud. The School's FY24 Operational Budget is \$23,143,557 (an increase of \$2,229,466) and the School Nutrition Budget is \$652,000 (a decrease of \$2,162). The FY24 Capital Improvement Budget requests total \$2,564,227. Their proposal also includes a 5% salary increase for all employees plus a 1.25% step increase for scaled employees and a health insurance increase of 9.9%. Additional major costs include 3 school security officers, a crisis alert system, a speech pathologist, Frontline, participation in the Chesapeake Bay Governor's School, an increase in contact services for ServiceMaster, and changes to the paraprofessional pay schedule. More information related to these costs can be found in the school's packet that was provided to the Board of Supervisors.

Northumberland Elementary School (NES) Principal, Mrs. Martha Williams, provided a packet to the Board and presented two of the larger concerns at the Elementary School that support Mr. Jeff Brann's capital improvement project requests. The first concern/proposal is moving the NES playground to a safer location on the property. The current location has poor drainage, limited accessibility, and poses a health and safety threat to the students/staff.

The second proposal presented by Mrs. Williams is replacing the remaining NES carpet floor with vinyl tile (LVT). The school was able to replace the carpet with LVT in the kindergarten

and first grade pods last year, and according to Mr. Jeff Brann, the maintenance and cleaning of LVT will save a ton of money in the future when compared to the carpet floor.

Dr. Wargo expressed the urgency of the Board's decision on the floor replacement proposal. If the Board allows the elementary school to replace the carpet floors with LVT, the school will need to move forward with the company sooner rather than later so the work can be completed during the summer months when school is not in session.

Dr. Wargo moved on to present the **School's Capital Improvement Requests** to the Board. The requests are as follows:

NES - Flooring Upgrades

NES - Playground Replacement

NES - Rooftop Stairway Installation

Mr. Jeff Brann explained that there is a ladder fixed into the concrete wall at the elementary school that employees utilize multiple times a day, but unfortunately it has become a severe safety issue. Mr. Brann received a quote from a company that can build a stairwell just like the high schools, giving access to the roof overtop the gym and all the individual pods.

NES/NMS/NHS - Well Replacement

Mr. Brann explained that the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) requires that NCPS properly abandon either the high school well or the elementary school well in accordance with the Virginia Department of Health regulation no later than March 1, 2026. Mr. Brann's recommendation would be to remove the elementary school well due to the equipment and the condition of that particular well.

Supervisor Tomlin asked if there was any rationale for choosing one over the other.

Mr. Brann stated that a representative from Virginia Tech recommended the County get one individual well to feed both schools pending the approval of an engineer. If an engineer confirms that one well can feed both schools, Mr. Brann recommends this avenue because DEQ will more than likely request the school abandon the other well too due to lack of grouting in the installation process.

Supervisor Tomlin then asked why an engineer would find fault in one well distributing to both schools.

Mr. Brann informed that Board that he doesn't have this expertise, but his guess could be distance.

County Administrator Tadlock informed the Board that he reached out to the County Attorney to see if the School Division could utilize the County's water/wastewater engineer on retainer.

NMS/NHS - Concrete Walkway Repairs

Mr. Brann informed the Board that an employee reported the School to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) due to the concrete sidewalks being a trip hazard.

School Board Office - New Construction

Dr. Wargo explained that the school already has the funding for this request and is currently requesting bids for the new construction.

NCPS Bus Garage – Busses

Dr. Wargo stated that the transportation fleet is aging and in desperate need of upgrading (Urgent - two 77 passenger, \$116,238 each and one 35 passenger, \$117,755 each).

NES/NMS/NHS - Parking Lot Resurfacing

Dr. Wargo explained that cracks are forming, and all painted markings need reapplication in the NCPS parking lots.

Supervisor Tomlin asked when the parking lots were last sealed.

Mr. Brann stated he knew there was a reseal job done at the elementary school at some point but wasn't sure exactly when. Mr. Brann estimated that job being complete in 2018, but informed the Board that their parking lot looks worse than the high school.

NHS - Athletic Track Resurfacing

Dr. Wargo stated that the current athletic track surface is showing signs of wear and is starting to delaminate from its concrete under surface. The maintenance department continually patches damaged areas to prevent any trip hazards, however these areas are gradually getting larger and more difficult to repair. Along with this, the painted lines are becoming less visible due to continued use and UV damage.

NCPS Bus Garage - Security Fence

Dr. Wargo informed the Board that the security fence is collapsing at the back of the building. All supporting poles are deteriorating past the point of repair.

NCPS Maintenance Department - Service Truck with Snowplow Capabilities

Dr. Wargo explained that the current service truck has an excessive number of miles and is becoming very costly to maintain. The School Division relies heavily on this truck for snow plowing and salting the parking lots/bus loops during winter weather.

NES - Boiler System Upgrade

Dr. Wargo stated that the current oil-fired boilers are 26 years old and have surpassed their design service life. Replacing each boiler with two propane boiler systems will provide a cleaner and more efficient means of heat, as well as allowing for the discontinued use of an aging underground diesel fuel tank.

NES - Generator Replacement

Dr. Wargo informed the Board that the elementary school generator is becoming increasingly more expensive to maintain due to its 26-year age. Unscheduled electrical load drops are becoming a common occurrence due to the age of the generator windings and poor condition of the ATS. The ATS is becoming hard to find parts for and due to excessive wear to the generator's diesel engine fuel governing system, certain sensitive pieces of equipment are susceptible to equipment failure from irregular voltage supply.

NMS/NHS - RTU Replacement

Dr. Wargo explained that each RTU at the middle and high school is in its 13th year of an average 15-year service life. The facility has a total of 13 RTU's and the maintenance department recommends a gradual replacement of four units per year.

Dr. Wargo continued her presentation by moving on to transportation fleet information so the Board could address any questions to Ms. Branem.

Supervisor Tomlin asked how many students are in a 77-passenger bus.

Ms. Branem explained that, on average, there are about 50-60 students on each bus and a 77-passenger bus is based on three kids to a seat. Ms. Branem also stated that with purchasing buses, there is an eight-to-ten-month lead time.

Dr. Wargo thanked Ms. Branem and continued her presentation by sharing a chart that showed the 2023-2024 health insurance premiums. Along with this, Dr. Wargo presented the school's

budget calendar and announced their upcoming proposed budget public hearing on March 13, 2023.

Finance Director Tara Booth provided the Board with a table comparing the local salary scales, but stated there was an error and she would get the Board a corrected version as soon as possible. Mrs. Booth then presented the revenue detail, expenditure detail, and supplemental information to the Board. More information on this can be found in the Board's packet.

Supervisor Tomlin asked what qualifications school security officers are required to have.

Dr. Wargo explained that the Department of Justice has programs that the officers must enroll in to obtain their certification such as school security officer summer training. Dr. Wargo confirmed that the standards for school security officers are quite different than deputies.

Dr. Wargo stated that a majority of the packet consists of salary scales and offered the Board to review that in their own time.

Finance Director Booth continued the presentation by going through the school nutrition budget and ESSER grant budgets.

Supervisor Tomlin asked about the deadline of the ESSER III grant.

Finance Director Booth confirmed the deadline for this grant is not until 2024.

Dr. Wargo concluded her presentation by thanking Finance Director Booth and her team for working so hard on the budget.

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

The School Board and Board of Supervisors agreed to schedule another joint meeting on April 12, 2023 at 5:30 p.m. Superintendent Wargo would like to meet with the Board of Supervisors as often as possible as they work through the budget approval process.

3. County Administrator Items

Information: A. Southern Air

County Administrator Tadlock informed the Board that the Southern Air contract is still being reviewed and hopes to have more information by the next meeting on March 9, 2023.

Information: B. Fiscal Year 2022 Audit Update

County Administrator Tadlock stated that the fiscal year 2022 audit is complete, and it will be presented to the Board at the March 9, 2023 meeting.

4. Closing of Meeting

Action: A. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn.

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

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

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

Not Present at Vote: Ronald L. Jett