

Special Called Board of Supervisors Meeting (Thursday, May 4, 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

Ms. Morgan Wilson, Executive Assistant

Mr. Robert Headley, IT Administrator

Mr. Matthew Bailey, IT Assistant

1. Opening of Meeting

Information: A. Call to Order

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

Action: B. Remote Participation

Mr. Haynie indicated that he had received a request by Mr. Ronnie Jett to participate in the meeting tonight by electronic communications from a remote location due to a personal medical condition. Mr. Haynie indicated that he had approved such participation under the County's adopted remote participation policy and ask that the Board of Supervisors ratify this decision to allow Mr. Jett to participate remotely.

Motion to ratify Mr. Haynie's approval and to allow Vice Chairman Jett to participate via zoom during the meeting as allowed under the Board's adopted remote participation policy.

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

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.

County Administrator Tadlock announced that the School Board's budget request is \$23,331,811 and reflects an increase of \$2,343,082 in additional county funds when compared to last year's

budget. Mr. Tadlock made everyone in attendance aware that the Board will not be taking action on this matter tonight because it is required by code to wait seven days before action can be taken on the budget.

Public Hearing Open.

Ms. Amy Fetter loves working for the school as a bus driver but believes it's time for the County to follow their neighbors in providing health insurance and benefits for them. Ms. Fetter wants people to come to the County and build their families here without the worry of health insurance and benefits.

Ms. Kim Reid thanked the School Board for approving the benefits for the bus drivers and expressed how hard it is to get people to want to work for the school without benefits.

Mr. Frank Johnson is a teacher at the high school and recommends the Board approve the school's full budget request as proposed.

Mrs. Katie Wilkins is a resident of the County and an employee of NUCPS. Mrs. Wilkins explained that she has only been an employee in the County for one year and is impressed by the leadership of staff and students. She urged the Board to support and approve the proposed budget request from the school, so they can continue to provide for the students.

Mr. Shannon Wilkins is not a part of the school system, but he supports their needs. Mr. Wilkins expressed the importance of adding and keeping quality teachers in the community because they are the ones who ultimately raise the children in the County. Mr. Wilkins stated that the best quality teacher can be found by spending some money.

Ms. Lynn Stuart stated that she is not against the school or against budgeting, but she is against extreme increases in the budget without a real justification. Based on the auditor's report, the end of year balance in the operation fund was in excess of \$4.4M. Ms. Stuart went through several individual line items from five to six years' worth of audits and budgets to see what money was spent on each line item versus what was budgeted. Overall, Ms. Stuart found that there were many line items that were either underspent or overspent and as a taxpayer in the County, she would like to know where the underspent money went. Ms. Stuart closed by stating that since 2019, there has never been an instruction actual cost above \$13M. So, for the school to request \$16.6M this year with a lesser number of students seems out of place to her.

Ms. Shelby Brooks is an employee at the school because she believes in giving back to the community and she wants to see the schools flourish for future generations. Ms. Brooks urged the Board to support the proposed School Board budget request in order to be competitive with the neighboring counties.

Mrs. Stacey Lee stated that the teachers are asking for a raise and additional security with a willingness to pay for whatever increases necessary. Mrs. Lee is willing to make the sacrifice in order to keep the students/staff safe and create opportunities that the neighboring counties have.

Mrs. Gayle Sterrett believes everyone is a part of the community who loves and supports children's education, but in order to do that, a budget needs to be passed that reflects the prioritization of education and all it requires. Mrs. Sterrett continued by listing the items that primarily reflect the budget increase and by addressing some of the concerns of the public in relation to the audit. She asked the Board to approve the budget as soon as possible so they can offer contracts before the end of the school year.

Mr. James Penney stated that there is a document (estimated average cost per pupil) that is required by state code to be included in the school's budget and he does not see that document anywhere.

Mr. Blizzard stated that the school is currently in competition with other regions for teachers and he wonders why the Board waits so long to give the School Board the money they need to retain teachers. Mr. Blizzard urged the Board to re-think their 2021 decision of withholding funds and not allowing the School Board to move forward.

Mr. Robert Jackson asked if the budget is approved, would there be a 30% tax increase.

Mr. Maurice Johnson stated that he noticed around \$10.5M underspent over the past three school years and he would like to know where this money is before giving them more. Mr. Johnson asked the Board to do the right kind of audit to account for where the money is.

Mrs. Karen Baker urged those with questions to come into the school and speak with anyone that is a part of the school system. She stated that they are doing the best they can with what they have.

Mrs. Suzanne Smart believes the Board was elected to serve the residents of the County based on reasoning and facts. Mrs. Smart is also concerned about where the unspent monies are and hopes the Board considers this when voting on the budget.

Mr. Fisher stated that his family left a community that was getting killed with school taxes and they had 30% tax increases multiple times over the years. Mr. Fisher understands that employees of the school need a raise, but increasing the taxes doesn't really leave them any better off. He believes the older generations won't be able to afford to stay here and the younger generations won't be able to afford housing.

Mr. Jason Smart explained that the taxes will almost definitely be increased because of the proposed budget. Mr. Smart did some research that shows this year's request being the largest single-year increase and he believes it needs to be revisited.

Mr. Jim Michelle wants the Board to analyze the budget, find where the monies are, and find out if they were properly allocated.

Ms. Latasha Lee understood that everyone would like the Board to dive deeper into the financials at the school, but she asked what they would do if the money isn't there. She encouraged the Board to pass their budget because they need their support.

Mrs. Susan Bates would love to see more people from the community come into the school to see the projects the kids have done. She emphasized that these projects and opportunities cannot occur without funding.

Mr. Phil Gates stated that the Board should insist the school present a budget in a timely manner that makes sense. Mr. Gates believes simple line items are needed in the budget in order to make a reasonable decision.

Public Hearing Closed.

Supervisor Long asked if the Board would be able to vote on the school budget at the regular meeting on May 11, 2023.

County Administrator Tadlock stated he would get clarification on this but believes the seven-day period will be over by the regular meeting.

3. 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)(1); 1. Discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidates for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body; and evaluation of performance of departments or schools of public institutions of higher education where such evaluation will necessarily involve discussion of the performance of specific individuals. Any teacher shall be permitted to be present during a closed meeting in which there is a discussion or consideration of a disciplinary matter that involves the teacher and some student and the student involved in the matter is present, provided the teacher makes a written request to be present to the presiding officer of the appropriate board. Nothing in this subdivision, however, shall be construed to authorize a closed meeting by a local governing body or an elected school board to discuss compensation matters that affect the membership of such body or board collectively.

Motion by: Thomas H. Tomlin, second by: James M. Long.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

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

Action: B. Reconvene into Open Meeting

Motion to reconvene into open session.

Motion by: Thomas H. Tomlin, second by: James M. Long.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

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

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, Thomas H. Tomlin, James M. Long, James W. Brann

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

Information: D. Action(s) taken from Closed Meeting

No action was taken as a result of the closed meeting.

4. Closing of Meeting

Supervisor Brann stated that the school was required to do a correction plan in relation to the concerns with the audit. Mr. Brann believes the school has worked on this plan, but asked what the County has done to ensure the plan would be followed through.

Action: A. Scope of Work School Audit Research

Motion to authorize staff to contact Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates to begin researching what would be included in the scope of work for another school audit.

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

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

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

Action: B. Carry Over

Motion to carry over to the special called meeting on May 8, 2023 at 5:30 p.m.

Motion by: Thomas H. Tomlin, second by: James M. Long.

Final Resolution: Motion Carried

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