

Northumberland County
Joint Finance Committee Meeting
Thursday, September 28, 2023- 6:00 p.m.
General District Courtroom- 72 Monument Pl, Heathsville

I. Call To Order

Mr. Richard Haynie, Chairman for the Northumberland Board of Supervisors called the County/School Work Group meeting to order.

II. Introductions

Dr. Karen Pica, PhD, started the introductions and explained that she's hoping to offer some expertise and learn from this experience while addressing the concerns of the County citizens. Dr. Pica is serving as the citizen member on behalf of the Board of Supervisors.

Mrs. Denise Mazyck, District III School Board member, expressed her excitement of giving back to the children and the community.

Dr. Linwood Blizzard, citizen member on behalf of the School Board, serves as the Senior Pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church and is excited to look for ways both Boards can find synergy to advance the community and the children.

Mrs. Dana O'Bier, District I School Board member for eight years, is thankful that Mr. Brann suggested the formation of this committee to work together on a common goal.

Mr. Richard Haynie, Chairman and District II representative for the Board of Supervisors, is looking forward to working together to gather necessary information from these meetings.

Mr. Jimmy Brann, Vice Chairman and District I representative for the Board of Supervisors, shared his excitement on the formation of this group and hopes both Boards can find some common ground to meet the County's needs.

Mr. Luttrell Tadlock, County Administrator, is serving as an advisory member to answer any questions anyone may have. He shared his excitement for working with the group.

Dr. Holly Wargo, School Division Superintendent, thanked Mr. Brann for suggesting these meetings and stated she is looking forward to meeting with everyone.

III. Organization of Work Group

a. Chair and Vice Chair Discussion

Mr. Haynie asked if anyone had nominations for Chairman.

Mrs. O'Bier asked if appointing a Chairman and Vice Chair was necessary for a group that's working together on a common goal. She asked for Mr. Brann's suggestion since the formation of the group was his idea.

Mr. Brann would like to see one person from each side (Board of Supervisors and School Board) head these meetings. Mr. Brann recommended the citizen representatives, Dr. Pica and Mr. Blizzard, organize the meetings.

Dr. Linwood Blizzard asked what the scope of work is for these meetings because the objectives seem unclear. He asked if the group will be creating the budget for the School Board to present to the Board of Supervisors or will the group only be making recommendations on how to proceed with the budget.

Dr. Pica stated that everyone has the same objective and that is having preparation for the youth of this County. Dr. Pica expressed her belief that the group shouldn't work on putting together the budget because that expertise belongs elsewhere, but she'd like to see the group address citizens' questions related to the budget and what's in it.

Mr. Brann stated that this group will not be making any decisions. The group meetings will involve discussions in order to get answers on certain issues.

Dr. Blizzard asked what the overall purpose of the group is.

Mr. Brann stated that the main goal is to address the questions and concerns that citizens bring to the Board of Supervisors.

Mrs. O'Bier would like to see the committee break down the items in the school budget before presenting it to the Board in March, which will in turn minimize the delay of budget approval.

Mrs. O'Bier asked how often the group would meet.

Mr. Brann stated he'd like to see the group meet at least once a month at this time and when the group becomes more established, then they could reevaluate and meet once every other month.

Dr. Pica believes the citizen representatives will have to meet more often to come up with some objectives/questions for the group to address at upcoming meetings.

Dr. Blizzard stated that there is a broken relationship between the two Boards and conversations between the two citizen representatives cannot mend that relationship. He also explained the recent budget approval timeline and the hardships teachers face with receiving their contracts at such a late time. Mr. Blizzard would like to see the budget approval timeline look similar to the year 2020 when contracts were issued around April or May.

Mr. Brann stated that the discussion taking place at these meetings will hopefully help with the budget timeline. The members of the Board of Supervisors and the School Board can take the questions and concerns back to both boards, which will allow better communication during the entire process.

After further discussion, the group agreed that a preliminary school board budget should be submitted to the Board of Supervisors ahead of time so the work group can address any citizen concerns. This will allow the Board of Supervisors to have all the necessary information they need to approve the County budget in a timely manner so contracts can be issued to staff by April/May.

Mrs. O'Bier clarified that the work group goal is to eliminate the three-month timeline of back-and-forth questions between the boards before budget approval.

Mr. Brann stated that is the goal, but he cannot promise that outcome.

Mrs. O'Bier asked what the group name is going to be because she wasn't in favor of the current name, "County/School Work Group." She believes the school is a part of the County.

Dr. Pica explained that it is referred to as the "Joint Finance Committee" in the August 2, 2023, meeting notes. Everyone agreed on naming the committee "Joint Finance Committee."

Mrs. Mazyck shared her take away from the discussion thus far:

"There will be co-leads for this committee who will be the community liaisons. At this point there will be monthly meetings and at the end of each meeting, the committee will decide on a date for the next meeting versus picking a scheduled day each month. The co-leads will focus on communication, timelines, and concerns of the citizens and bring that information to the group for consensus. Then, both Board representatives will take that information back to their Boards based on a common set of notes/minutes from the committee meeting."

IV. Public Comment Period

Mr. Haynie invited the public to comment at this time.

Mr. James Penney explained that something to consider is the County did not have a final state budget until three days before the end of June. Mr. Penney stated that this makes it extremely difficult for the Board of Supervisors to make any decisions because they don't know what income is coming to the County.

Mr. Jim Michelle arrived late to the meeting and asked if the group was only focusing on budgetary processes or can other items be discussed at these meetings.

Mr. Haynie stated that is not the way he looks at the committee. He continued and informed Mr. Michelle that he'd like the committee to address any questions from the citizens regarding the County, School, budget, or any other concern.

Mrs. O'Bier invited Mr. Michelle to call her directly at any time to ask any questions.

Mr. Brann stated that finances and the budget have always been a hot topic, but everything discussed doesn't necessarily have to revolve around that because some citizens may have questions about the curriculum, for example.

Mrs. O'Bier asked why a question like that wouldn't be brought to a School Board meeting.

Mr. Michelle gave a scenario where a citizen did bring the question to a School Board meeting, but the citizen didn't get the answer they wanted so he asked if it would be appropriate at this time to bring that question to the committee. In summary, Mr. Michelle would like to know what the limitations are of this committee.

Mrs. O'Bier believes that this further creates a divide between the Boards that is trying to be resolved.

Dr. Pica explained that concerns like this could be addressed to the School's Community Advisory Committee. She stated that she couldn't find these meetings posted anywhere, but that does not mean they are not available to the public.

Mrs. O'Bier informed Dr. Pica that Community Advisory Committee meetings are held at each school level with the principal.

Mr. Michelle asked if those meetings were published.

Mrs. O'Bier stated that they are published on the website under each individual school calendar.

Dr. Pica suggested the School and County have one calendar for all meetings.

Mr. Blizzard stated that this concern should be addressed to the School Board because they would be able to answer any questions and address any concerns regarding the flow of the website.

Mrs. Lynn Stuart stated that the citizens have been asking for a Citizens Advisory Board for two years and she feels that the formation of this committee is a step in the right direction. She appreciates the Community Advisory Board for each individual school, but she explained that there is a much larger population of citizens who are not parents but are still concerned stakeholders (taxpayers, residents, grandparents, friends, etc.) in the school. Mrs. Stuart believes the discussions that occur at these meetings will more than likely go beyond finances, and if they do, they should not be precluded from the discussion simply because they go beyond finances. She stated that some questions regarding curriculum can be tied to budget issues, so she asked that the scope of work not be too narrow and to use this committee as a communication tool between both Boards.

Mrs. O'Bier stated that she only sees those in the crowd tonight at the Board of Supervisor meetings and not the School Board meetings.

Mrs. Stuart stated that she attended two school board meetings and when she spoke, there was no acknowledgment of courage, honesty, or transparency and she felt dismissed.

Mrs. O'Bier apologized to Mrs. Stuart and assured her that this would not happen again.

Mrs. Stuart further explained that the people in the crowd are trying to do the right thing for the kids in the school but also balance it for the citizens. She continued by stating that the County cannot tax its way out of its current financial situation without driving people out of the County. Mrs. Stuart believes there must be a way to balance the needs of the school and the needs of the citizens, which is possibly the greatest outcome of this committee.

Dr. Pica asked if the committee could start with the finances while encouraging citizens to go to school board meetings to get other questions answered too.

Dr. Pica stated that she is not aware of how the School Board or the County budget is prepared and believes that this would make a great presentation. She asked the committee if this is something that should occur during a public meeting or if she should schedule private sessions on how the budget works.

Mr. Brann believes that this will help educate the public and give them a better understanding of how the budget is put together.

Dr. Pica stated that she'd be happy to get with whoever would be creating the presentations and offer any questions that she'd have to serve as a basis for the budget 101 presentations. Dr. Pica and Mrs. O'Bier suggested starting with a breakdown of how the numbers in the budget are derived.

Dr. Blizzard asked what the timeline looks like for the presentations and stated that this information should be presented at both the Board of Supervisors and School Board meetings in addition to the Joint Finance Committee meetings.

Dr. Pica stated that the budget 101 presentations could be presented at the next committee meeting. She then asked when the next joint quarterly meeting is between the Boards.

County Administrator Tadlock explained that he would get with Dr. Wargo and come up with some dates for the next joint quarterly meeting with the Board of Supervisors and School Board. When this date is set, the budget 101 presentations can be presented at this meeting to keep both Boards informed.

The Joint Finance Committee agreed to meet again on Thursday, November 2, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. in the General District Courtroom.

Dr. Pica gave an overview of the action items for the committee thus far:

Action Items: Dr. Pica and Dr. Blizzard are going to get together and come up with several objectives such as communication resolution, an analysis to find the root cause of trust/transparency, and the scope of work for this committee. The representatives of the School Board are going to communicate with their Board and discuss whether a preliminary budget can be submitted by a certain date so questions/concerns can be addressed faster. The School Board will also communicate with their Board on the most efficient date for finalizing the budget so contracts can be issued at their desired date. The Board of Supervisors need to research if the School's budget can be preliminarily approved and if so, what is the legality of that approval so the school can issue their contracts. Three priority goals of this committee discussed so far are transparency and a resolution for communication and process issues. County Administrator Tadlock will work on scheduling the next joint quarterly meeting between the Board of Supervisors and School Board so that the budget 101 presentations can be presented to both Boards in addition to this committee. A public comment period will need to be added to the agenda for the committee meetings and lastly, Dr. Pica offered to meet with the budget 101 presentation creators to offer any questions that may serve as a basis for the presentation.

Mr. Blizzard asked what's the record keeping process for this committee.

County Administrator Tadlock explained that we would be keeping minutes for this group's meetings, and they will be posted on the County website.

Mr. Brann suggested not tackling too much at a time and as a result, no progress be made.

Mr. Haynie asked if anyone in the virtual world would like to speak, but no comments were made.

V. Adjournment

Mr. Haynie closed the meeting and stated that the next meeting will be held on November 2, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. in the General District Courtroom.