

The Alleghany County Board of Commissioners and the Alleghany Board of Education met in special session on Wednesday, March 14, 2007, at 5:30pm in the Commissioners Meeting Room of the County Administration Building, 348 South Main Street, Sparta, North Carolina. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss school facilities.

Present: County—Chair Ken Richardson, Commissioner Randy Miller, Commissioner Doug Murphy, County Manager Don Adams, and Clerk to the Board Karen Evans. Commissioner Milly Richardson and Vice-Chair Warren Taylor were present but arrived late. Board of Education—Chair Clarence Crouse, Vice-Chair Betsy Dillon, Faron Atwood, Mitch Franklin, Joel Souther and Superintendent Dr. Jeff Cox.

Chair Ken Richardson called the Commissioners' meeting to order.

Clarence Crouse called the Board of Education meeting to order.

Chair Ken Richardson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Clarence Crouse asked for a moment of silence.

County Manager Don Adams and Dr. Cox explained ideas on how to proceed with these meetings.

Chair Ken Richardson encouraged questions from the Commissioners and Board of Education.

Clarence Crouse talked about the Board of Education's devotion to the project.

Commissioner Milly Richardson joined the meeting at 5:40pm.

Mitch Franklin stated this appreciation for the opportunity to meet with the Board of Commissioners and how they are willing to work with the Commissioners.

Betsy Dillon talked about the need for a middle school and how children can benefit from a middle school.

Faron Atwood talked about the opportunities available to the students if the three schools are combined; for example, vocational programs. He further talked about the amount of work that the Board of Education has put into this concept.

Joel Souther reiterated the vocational needs in the county.

Commissioner Doug Murphy asked if the Board of Education has had discussions regarding the middle school being 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades versus 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades. He asked for the pros and cons of both. He talked about the need in every county to have programs where the students can do hands-on activities. He asked has programs been prepared for this type of education.

Clarence Crouse stated that several discussions have occurred regarding the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades versus 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades. He explained that they are in the opinion that the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades would be better than 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades. He talked about reasons for deciding for the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades and against the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades.

Dr. Cox talked about the transition periods for the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades versus 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades. He gave an example of Ashe County. He talked about issues with teacher licensures if going towards the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades. He stated that the teaching costs would go up with the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades even though the building costs would go down.

John Farrelly stated that is accurate unless the programs are changed for the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades, which isn't their preference.

Commissioner Doug Murphy talked about offering vocational programs at one location.

John Farrelly talked about instructional time as well as travel time being an issue.

Dr. Cox gave examples of having a vocational room set up at each school.

Commissioner Milly Richardson talked about occupational education in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade when she went to school. She asked about looking at those classes again.

Clarence Crouse explained how the occupational education programs worked and the lack of space now. He talked about how it will be worked into the middle school program. He further talked about different levels of classes.

Commissioner Doug Murphy and John Farrelly talked about testing for science in the middle school grades.

John Farrelly talked about having to cut back on enrichment classes due to making sure the necessary education is provided. He talked about classes that can't be provided due to space and lack of teachers. He explained how they have researched the programming for the middle school. He stated that the costs will be \$700,000 to \$900,000. He talked about the facility costs.

Commissioner Randy Miller and John Farrelly talked about the middle school would have 24 classrooms.

Mitch Franklin stated that it would only save four to five classrooms if the county goes with 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades for the middle school.

Commissioner Randy Miller talked about his son who is a senior in college, scored high on the SAT, and then called to say he was very behind when he started college. He further talked about his experience in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and being in an advanced class. He asked if the Board of Education is going to offer something like this. He stated that the kids need vocational and technology classes.

Dr. Cox gave examples of vocational needs and the skill level needed in today's world.

Commissioner Doug Murphy and Faron Atwood talked about the kids need opportunities to challenge them at every level.

John Farrelly talked about raising the level of instruction.

Commissioner Doug Murphy asked if the old 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade-building is being used and are all the buildings being used.

Dr. Cox stated yes.

Mitch Franklin talked about challenging every student regardless of education level. He further talked about he thinks it is cheaper to offer all of the middle school opportunities at one location instead of three. He stated that they need to provide equal opportunity for every student as compared to other counties.

Commissioner Doug Murphy stated that the Commissioners were elected to be good stewards of the County's money.

Commissioner Randy Miller asked about being a small county regarding student population.

Dr. Cox stated that the school population is approximately 1,500 total and a middle school would be around 300.

Commissioner Doug Murphy stated that his experience is that big classes make a difference for the kids trying to learn.

Mitch Franklin talked about looking for direction from the Commissioners in order to know where the Board of Education needs to go.

Commissioner Milly Richardson talked about Monday's night debt service conversations, and the amount the County could borrow before getting called on by the Local Government Commission.

County Manager Don Adams stated that is about \$8,000,000.

Commissioner Milly Richardson compared that to people maxing out their personal credit line, which isn't financially responsible. She talked about the conversations from Monday night and not being comfortable going further in debt.

Commissioner Doug Murphy asked about the status of the State's school bonds. He stated that the Board wants to do the best thing for education.

Dr. Cox stated that the Governor's proposed budget doesn't include school construction monies. He talked about the need to appeal to citizens to let the General Assembly and the Governor's office know the county's situation. He stated that whatever Alleghany County gets won't cover the facilities needs.

County Manager Don Adams talked about the way the subcommittees are figuring the formulas for this state bond versus the last bond, and the new formula drastically reduces what Alleghany County would receive.

Commissioner Milly Richardson stated that 29% of county taxes go towards education, and the prior boards were not slack in dealing with education.

County Manager Don Adams talked about the debt load. He gave an example of taking everything that the County has borrowed in the last 10 years and double it is what we are talking about.

Clarence Crouse mentioned that if we wait 5 more years, how much more expensive it will be.

Commissioner Milly Richardson stated that she understands that but at this point, the County can't take on that much debt.

Mitch Franklin stated the need to look at all avenues for funding.

Commissioner Milly Richardson talked about looking at ways to get kids all of the opportunities that can be available without spending a lot of money.

Mitch Franklin stated that all anyone needs to do is go visit a middle school to see.

Commissioner Warren Taylor arrived at 6:23pm.

Commissioner Doug Murphy talked about being stewards of the money that has been entrusted to the County. He further talked about the need to look at it as a goal not a problem.

Commissioner Milly Richardson talked about the impact of revaluation on property owners, and they can't pay anymore taxes.

Commissioner Doug Murphy talked about the need to work together.

Clarence Crouse asked if the Commissioners support the concept of a middle school and the programming. He stated that if that is a goal of both boards, then the challenge is to find ways to accomplish the goal. He asked how quickly we can move towards a 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades middle school. He used Glade Creek Elementary School as an example because they need more space and would use all of the classrooms that would be vacated from moving the middle school-aged children.

Commissioner Milly Richardson asked about the high school being close to over crowded, and how does the Board of Education plan to deal with that.

Clarence Crouse stated they can add more students per class and combine classes.

Dr. Cox stated that facility wise, the high school is in the best shape. He stated that he appreciates the Commissioners' comments on the funding but asked will we really ever get to the point of building the middle school.

Faron Atwood talked about expenses that we will have if we stay the way we are. He further talked about how hard it is to shoot in the dark for the number. He asked the Commissioners to tell them a number that the County can handle.

Commissioner Milly Richardson stated that it is a fair assumption that the County will not be able to build a middle school this year but can't say when. She talked about everyone should look at meeting the immediate needs at the schools and see how to offer the vocational programs.

Commissioner Doug Murphy stated that the Commissioners haven't even got the budget done. He stated that he intends to talk to the people in Raleigh. He further stated that there is a difference between want and need.

Joel Souther stated that if the middle school doesn't happen this year, then Piney Creek Elementary School needs a new gym and Glade Creek Elementary School needs water/sewer and these types of needs will be brought to you.

Commissioner Milly Richardson talked about meeting the immediate needs and the goal shouldn't be forgotten.

Mitch Franklin talked about the need to look at both scenarios. He stated that he doesn't want the middle school concept to go away. He talked about the kids are getting left behind. He urged the Commissioners to do everything possible to find the money for the middle school. He stated the need to get the middle school as soon as possible. He further stated that economics are part of this, but it may save money over the years.

Commissioner Milly Richardson stated that the County can't spend \$10,000,000 this year, but it shouldn't be put off for years. She further stated that these are valid points that have been brought up. She said that it appears that the situation we're in is to get the schools what they need, and everyone is dedicated to the middle school concept.

Commissioner Warren Taylor stated that the Commissioners were prepared to go with a bond referendum at the last general election, and it didn't occur. He further stated that the election was held, and the voters spoke no more taxes. He explained that at Monday's budget meeting, the Board directed the County Manager to pursue a revenue-neutral tax rate. He stated that a statewide bond will be the best scenario. He further stated that if the Commissioners adhere to a revenue-neutral tax rate and with the current debt service, the County is looking at five years before that amount of money could be

borrowed. He talked about if the land-transfer tax could be passed then the middle school concept can be realized. He said he respects the Board of Education's opinion about what programming is best for the students.

Commissioner Milly Richardson stated that she has asked herself what John Woodruff would do. She talked about the Education Foundation, and Allegheny County has a lot of people with vast resources. She further talked about setting up a foundation to collect private donations to build the middle school.

Commissioner Doug Murphy talked about Stokes County and how they raised a lot of money for their schools.

Commissioner Milly Richardson talked about how people could help with this project. She stated that she thinks the place to start is to go to John Woodruff. She further stated the need to raise money quickly.

Betsy Dillon stated the County should be behind this project 100% and should put a lot of the money in it.

Dr. Cox talked about the voters did speak but the Commissioners ran on a pro-education and anti-tax platform.

Commissioner Milly Richardson talked about setting up our own foundation. She reiterated that she doesn't think it would be problem to raise a lot of money.

John Farrelly asked if \$5,000,000 is better than \$9,000,000.

County Manager Don Adams talked about the question is does the County support spending \$10,000,000 to \$11,000,000 and \$600,000 annually. He stated that is the question that needs to be answered, and if the County is in support then look at how it impacts the County financially.

Faron Atwood stated that if everyone waits five years then the costs will be \$20,000,000.

John Farrelly stated that the building costs are \$9,000,000 and \$700,000 for the annual operating costs.

Commissioner Milly Richardson talked about it comes back to ways to get the money without putting the load on the taxpayers.

Commissioner Doug Murphy stated that everyone needs to address this not as a problem but as a goal.

John Farrelly stated that if there is no middle school then we will have to build onto all three schools.

Dr. Cox asked are we really going to go there by starting to put the money together, having a plan and follow it for a middle school. He talked about having a facilities plan without direction. He stated that the Commissioners need to look at funding the recurring costs of \$600,000 to \$700,000 annually over and above current funding. He further stated that the Board of Education needs that answer.

Commissioner Milly Richardson stated that due to the fact of the rapid development, we probably could handle that but need the money for the building first. She further stated the need to concentrate on raising this money.

Commissioner Doug Murphy stated that the County will have to finance a portion of the project.

Commissioner Milly Richardson talked about providing the monies for the recurring costs. She stated that this is a great idea but the County doesn't have the money right now.

Clarence Crouse stated that the Board of Education will discuss this and request that the Commissioners discuss it further also. He talked about how do they plan for the upcoming budget.

Chair Ken Richardson stated that the Board of Education has done their job in recommending what they need. He talked about the County's responsibility is for paying for capital. He further talked about the need to raise 90% of the money in the county. He stated that he understands and appreciates the work that has gone into this project. He explained that he isn't willing to put another penny on the taxpayers without the issue going before the voters, and if they approve the project, fine. He stated that he wants to continue this discussion, but the Commissioners don't have a number for the Board of Education. He talked about putting the issue before the voters and see if they agree. He reminded everyone that the majority of the Commissioners have to agree to accomplish anything that has been asked. He stated that this issue may take another meeting.

Clarence Crouse stated that they appreciate the opportunity to schedule another meeting after each board has had further conversations.

Chair Ken Richardson asked for further comments.

John Farrelly briefly mentioned a handout that shows the end-of-grade test results for middle school grades in Alleghany County and surrounding areas.

Commissioner Doug Murphy stated that it is obvious that a middle school will remedy the low test scores according to this handout.

The Board of Education agreed.

Dr. Cox asked where we are going in the next meeting. He further asked how much are the Commissioners willing to invest without a referendum and how much are the Commissioners willing to put on a referendum or whether a referendum is even an option. Also, he asked how to plan for now.

Mitch Franklin thanked the Commissioners for their time.

Being no further business, Mitch Franklin made a motion to adjourn at 7:17pm. Joel Souther seconded the motion. Vote 5:0.

Being no further business, Commissioner Milly Richardson made a motion to adjourn at 7:18pm. Commissioner Doug Murphy seconded the motion. Vote 5:0.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Evans  
Clerk to the Board

Attest:

Ken Richardson  
Chairman