

October 11, 2021

The Washington County Board of Commissioners met in a recessed meeting on Monday, October 11, 2021 at 6:00 PM in Gym of Washington County High School, 800 East Main Street, Plymouth, NC. Commissioners Tracey Johnson, Ann Keyes, Carol Phelps and Julius Walker, Jr. were present. Also present were County Manager/County Attorney Curtis Potter, Clerk to the Board Julie J. Bennett and Finance Officer Missy Dixon. Commissioner Sexton was unable to attend.

Vice-Chair Johnson called the Board of County Commissioners recessed meeting to order. She then turned over the meeting to Chair Riddick. Chair Riddick led the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENTATION DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (DPI) FACILITIES REPORT ON WASHINGTON COUNTY SCHOOLS: Dr. Robert Taylor, Deputy State Superintendent Student and School Advancement NC, DPI led the discussion. All Board members previously received the 126 page report produced by DPI. Dr. Taylor discussed the summary that came out of that report. (See below.)

SUMMARY CONSIDERATIONS

When considering solutions to address the facilities challenges facing Washington County Schools, it is important to examine a few of the less-tangible issues. For example, every school in the district has experienced reduced enrollment in recent years. The 2019-2020 ADM for Plymouth HS was reported to be 275 students, even after closure and consolidation with Creswell HS. Administrators and Board of Education Members expect this trend to continue. As a result, the school district is maintaining significantly more facilities than are required for the current student population. This stretches the available resources and makes any evaluation of future facility use more complex.

The geography of Washington County presents additional challenges. WCS school facilities are generally located along an east-west stretch of US Highway 64, covering about 25 miles between the Plymouth and Creswell campuses. While small neighborhood schools are convenient and desirable for younger students, the trend for older students is to provide bigger schools and create a "critical mass" to share resource-intensive facilities like advanced science rooms, music and arts rooms, or career and technical education lab spaces. Consolidated facilities also create efficiency for resources such as transportation, administration, food service and maintenance functions. School sports teams and other extracurricular activities can benefit from larger enrollments. Additional efficiencies can be realized when maintaining fewer gymnasiums, stadiums, and other support facilities.

When evaluating these intangibles for Washington County Schools, it is worth considering some hypothetical facility options to address the issue of reduced enrollment. One option would be to combine the existing middle school and high school facilities into a single school facility in a central location within the county. Such a facility could provide the critical mass of students to more readily offer classes that are not available to a smaller, more dispersed student population. Benefits could include better resources and facilities, enhanced security, more academic choices, and increased efficiency with subsequent financial savings. Recent changes to consolidate high school and middle school students into two facilities within the county represent a similar effort and recognize the opportunity for similar efficiency gains.

For pre-K and elementary school populations, travel time and distance become more important factors. WCS Pre-K centers have already been added in centrally located school facilities. The likely solution for lower grades, because of geography, points to two facilities, one east and one west, to reduce the travel time and distance required for younger students.

The following are four options that provide possible solutions for bringing Washington County Schools' facilities into closer alignment with enrollment and capacity. These options acknowledge that, with the exception of the Pre-K Center, the newest existing facilities are all 25-30 years old. As described in the body of this report, nearly all existing buildings in the district are experiencing problems with aging systems and equipment. Mechanical and electrical systems, especially, are old and due for replacement or overhaul. New facilities are likely to be the best solution for the long term. A prime example is Washington County High School. The advanced age of most buildings there, the landlocked site, and the numerous building additions that "infill" the site, all present difficult use and maintenance challenges. Consequently, improving this facility would be very costly. It may be possible to construct new buildings on the WCHS site to the west of the existing cluster of buildings, but the space available there would require a smaller, multi-story facility. While this may be an attractive alternative to the following options, planning such a facility will require careful analysis of site use, program and phasing of the project, tasks that are beyond the scope of this report.

OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Option One

Consolidate the middle and high school facilities into a single new school facility, centrally located in the county. A new 6-12 or 7-12 facility could serve all secondary tiered students and would provide the efficiencies mentioned above.

Continue operating two elementary schools, one in the western part of the county and one in the eastern part, both feeding a single secondary school. The existing Pine E.S. would be a good facility for the western part of the county but, as indicated in the body of this report, it has extensive problems stemming from the buildings' envelope systems. Correcting these problems will likely require difficult and costly repairs. The existing Creswell E.S. would be an adequate facility for the eastern part of the county, but it too has various deficiencies that would need to be addressed. Option 1 makes it possible to address deficiencies and deferred maintenance within the existing elementary school buildings through a series of renovation and repair projects.

Option Two

Replace the high school with a new facility designed to serve all grade 9-12 students, centrally located in the county. Adapt, repair, and renovate the existing eastern and western elementary schools into K-8 facilities, regionally serving those student populations.

This solution could be implemented as a phased capital program involving a series of smaller construction projects over time.

Option Three

Consolidate all school facilities in the county into a single new K-12 campus, centrally located in the district. This option could offer a highly efficient, all-new facility serving all WCS students. This approach could represent a fresh start for improving facilities across the board. A single new K-12 school could be planned and constructed prior to closure of any existing facilities.

Option Four

Consolidate all school facilities in the county into two new K-12 campuses, one east, one west. The appeal of this option is that it most closely restores the community-based schools from the past. The Creswell campus provides a beginning for the eastern location, restoring the Early College Building to the original use as a comprehensive High School. The Western campus could be located near Plymouth utilizing a restored Pines Elementary School for early grades, or some other combination of the options listed above.

Conclusion

These options represent a range of possible solutions to help the Board of Education make decisions about how to address the facility conditions identified in this report. While there are variations to these options that could be considered, these options can serve as a starting point for master planning the future of Washington County School facilities.

Developing a comprehensive district building improvements program for Washington County Schools is essential. Retaining the services of an experienced professional designer is the best next step for developing solutions to improve building infrastructure and for planning the best use of resources. The primary goals for any comprehensive facility use strategy must be to achieve better alignment of facilities with district ADM projections, to address funding challenges, and to address the potential impact of closing facilities within the community they currently serve.

One thing that everyone agreed on is that the County has old buildings. The roofs and walls need to be opened up to see what's in them, then there would be a better idea of what the cost would be to repair them.

A Business Plan Study was mentioned by DPI—they want the BOE and BoCC to be fully informed. It was also stated that Pines Elementary School could still be used. The timeframe for building any new school would be a year for design and 2 years for construction—this is not a sprint—it's a steady race.

DPI opened the floor for questions from the Boards. Vice-Chair Johnson said the Commissioners defer to the County Manager. Mr. Potter, CM/CA talked about a spending summary that Dr. Carr, WCS Superintendent sent in an email on 10/11/2021 on ESSR spending and felt Dr. Carr should be the one to speak about that. Dr. Carr spoke on the information below.

ESSER II PRC 171- received \$2,946,526.21 late spring of 2021 and these funds must be spent by September 30, 2023.

Minimum of twenty percent of total allotment has to be used towards learning loss. We have allotted \$786,630.65 to address this need. Areas of focus here are hiring an Instructional technology Facilitator, District Reading Specialist, increase of Instructional Coach capacity. As well as provide professional development to all staff, implement AVID at WCMS, PGC at WCHS, extend and enhance district curriculum initiative, field experiences for students, and extend day programs.

Improving Air Quality: \$900,000. Max allowed

Air quality sensors and purification devices have been purchased. Heating and air units are being replaced as needed to ensure adequate air flow in all spaces. Other repairs to equipment as needed

Supplies to Sanitize and Clean: \$328,000

Hiring of additional Maintenance Worker to ensure safe and clean schools plus the purchase of PPE supplies and materials such as shields, face masks, etc and cleaning supplies such as electrostatic sprayers, disinfectant, hand sanitizer and sanitizing stations.

Education Technology: \$150,000

Computer based Interventions and Instructional Aides such as Edmentum and Edgenuity that will support student learning both virtually and remotely.

Mental Health Services: \$95,000

Hire additional SEL Support Staff and purchase of Social Emotion Resources to help students cope with added stress of the pandemic.

Summer Learning: \$658,396.31

Summer of 2021 and Summer of 2022 Summer Extend Learning Camps. Which includes teacher, TA, and bus driver salaries and bonuses. All instructional materials and supplies, snacks/ water, competency based assessment programs, field trips, events, etc.

Unbudgeted Reserve: \$28,499.25

Funds that remain to provide flexibility for unexpected situations that may arise due to Covid-19.

ESSER III PRC 181- received \$4,465,837.00 late spring of 2021 and these funds must be spent by September 30, 2024.

Minimum of twenty percent of total allotment has to be used towards learning loss. We have allotted \$1,105,248.00 to address this need. Areas of focus here are continuation of Instructional technology Facilitator, District Reading Specialist, increase of Instructional Coach capacity. As well as provide professional development to all staff, implement AVID at WCMS, PGC at WCHS, extend and enhance district curriculum initiative, field experiences for students, extend day programs, STEAM camps, MakerSpaces, increase support of arts based programs, and supplemental pay for educators that exceed growth

Facility Repairs \$500,000.00

Touchless fixtures and water filtration systems.

Improving Air Quality: \$117,754.00

Replace and repair of heating and air systems as needed to ensure adequate air flow in all spaces, purchasing of higher grade filters, HVAC repairs, and other repairs to equipment/ building as needed for ventilation and air quality

Supplies to Sanitize and Clean: \$288,244.00

Continuation of additional Maintenance Worker to ensure safe and clean schools, plus cleaning of all HVAC systems, ducts, and vents, the purchase of PPE supplies and materials such as shields, face masks, etc and cleaning supplies such as electrostatic sprayers, disinfectant, hand sanitizer and sanitizing stations.

Education Technology: \$440,000.00

Computer based Interventions and Instructional Aides such as Edmentum and Edgenuity that will support student learning both virtually and remotely. Plus repair and replacement of student and staff devices, AV/ Instructional Tech equipment to ensure virtually and remote learning experience and meetings are successful.

Mental Health Services: \$300,000.00

Continuation of additional SEL Support Staff and purchase of Social Emotion Resources to help students cope with added stress of the pandemic including flexible seating, and calm down room supplies.

Summer Learning: \$658,960.00

Summer of 2023 and Summer of 2024 Summer Extend Learning Camps. Which includes teacher, TA, and bus driver salaries and bonuses. All instructional materials and supplies, snacks/ water, competency based assessment programs, field trips, events, etc.

Other Activities \$1,027,737.00

Addressing staffing Needs of schools, additional resources to help principals and other district leaders retain staff and Unbudgeted Reserve Funds that remain to provide flexibility for unexpected situations that may arise due to Covid-19.

Additional release of \$2,201,899.00 in funding in 2022.

Mr. Potter stated that the county has \$1.5M for capital outlay funding for school capital expenses.

Ms. Carr Linda said based on the study, CES, dual language, and early college have found a home in the Creswell School. Ms. Carr went on to say that Pines Elementary School is still a wonderful school and located at an ideal spot and a new school there would become a beacon for our County. A new school would also become the new Central Office also.

BoE Chair Riddick said he felt that the County and WCS should begin having the 2-on-2 meetings to move forward. (Note: the 2-on-2 meetings are usually made up of the Board of Commissioners' Chair, Vice-Chair, County Manager (and Finance Officer if needed) and the Board of Education's Chair, Vice-Chair, Superintendent (and Finance Officer if needed).

Vice-Chair Johnson thanked the DPI staff for attending the meeting tonight.

At 6:55 PM, with no further business to discuss, **Commissioner Keyes made a motion to adjourn the Board of Commissioners meeting. Commissioner Phelps seconded. Vice-Chair Johnson proceeded with the roll call: Commissioner Walker, yea; Commissioner Phelps, yea; Commissioner Keyes, yea; Commissioner Johnson, yea. Motion carried unanimously.**

Tracey A. Johnson
Vice-Chair

Julie J. Bennett, CMC, NCMCC
Clerk to the Board