

SPECIAL MEETING
ASHE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
July 23, 2018

A joint meeting between the Ashe County Board of Education and the Ashe County Commissioners was held as scheduled at 1:00 pm at the Board of Education annex.

Present for the Board of Education were C.B. Jones, Dr. Lee Beckworth and Polly Jones. Mr. King was not present due to health reasons and Mr. Williams was out of town. Superintendent Yates, Principal Dustin Farmer and Assistant Principal Gordon Prince, and Architect Larry Greene were in attendance as well.

Present for the County Commissioners were William Sands, Larry Rhodes, Paula Perry and Todd McNeill. County Clerk Ann Clark, Interim County Manager Adam Stumb and County Finance Officer Sandy Long were also in attendance.

Chairman Jones welcomed everyone and gave a brief background on the middle school project. He particularly stated that he would like for both Boards to work together to build the best facility possible within the funding stream approved by the Commissioners. Chairman Jones turned the meeting over to Architect Larry Greene.

Mr. Greene distributed copies of the revised plans in which the square footage had been reduced to 139,661 to reduce costs. The plans are designed so that two classrooms can be added to each wing in the future. The cafeteria mimics the cafeteria at the high school. The primary gym will seat 800 and an auxiliary gym is included. He explained that the current plans are in line with recommendations from the Division of School Planning except for the auditorium. School Planning recommends that an auditorium seat half of the expected population, which would require 400 seats. The Board had directed Mr. Greene to reduce the auditorium to seat one-third in order to save money. Current building costs are between \$159 to \$200 per square foot—Mr. Green feels the current increase in steel tariffs will increase building costs even more.

Discussion was heard on the realistic amount to allocate for the project. County Finance Officer Sandy Long felt that \$32M over 20 years was a realistic amount and would require annual payments of approximately \$3M. She did ask both Boards if there were any other large projects planned in the near future. Mr. Stumb felt a \$35M project could possibly put a strain on the county. Mrs. Long said that funds from sales tax monies allocated to the schools were currently being put in a reserve that could be used on a “pay as we go” basis for architect fees and site development. Larry Rhodes also mentioned the idea of the Board using monies in its fund balance towards the project. Both ideas would help to reduce the amount the county would have to borrow from the Local Government Commission. Superintendent Yates discussed the capital needs fund allocated at the State level for Tier 1 counties. The State plans to open the application process August 1, and the turnaround window is short. Ashe County can apply for a maximum of \$15M. One of the determining factors in the selection process is how far along a school system is in its project. Should Ashe County be awarded this grant, funding for the middle school project would no longer be an issue. The County Commissioners agreed to submit a letter of recommendation with the application package. Principal Dustin Farmer asked if it would be possible to include office space to house a counselor on the wing for each grade level rather than housing the counselors in the administration area. Commissioner Rhodes directed the architect to change the auditorium seating back to 400.

Both Boards were in agreement that the middle school project is important and that both sides will partner together to provide the best facility possible. The meeting adjourned at 2:15 pm.