

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF AVERY**

The Avery County Board of Commissioners held a Special Joint Meeting with the Avery County Board of Education on Tuesday, January 15, 2019 at 5:30 p.m. in the Commissioners Board Room, Avery County Administrative Complex, 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Avery County High School Addition and Renovation.

Members Present: Martha Hicks, Chair; Dennis Aldridge; Tim Phillips; Wood Hall Young, Jr.

Members Absent: Blake Vance (work)

Board of Education Members Present: John Greene, Chair; Kathy Aldridge, Vice-Chair; Jan Bumgarner; Pat Edwards; Steve Smith

Call To Order

Motion by Tim Phillips and second by Dennis Aldridge to call the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Motion unanimously approved with those in attendance (4-0).

Motion by Jan Bumgarner and second by Kathy Aldridge to call the Board of Education to order at 5:30 p.m. Motion unanimously approved.

Pat Edwards gave the invocation.
The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Recess

Chair Hicks called for a brief recess.
Chair Hicks called the meeting back to order after a recess for dinner.

Dr. Taylor thanked the Boards for the opportunity to present the high school project. Tonight represents the next step in us achieving our dream in building the new classroom addition and the renovations at the high school and we continue to be excited about that. April 23, 2018 we had a similar meeting that we presented cost estimate and a timeline on the project. At the conclusion of the meeting we decided that we would come back to you in December and give you an update. Unfortunately, we had this meeting scheduled for earlier in December and the snow won out. Tonight's meeting is also out of respect to a decision that you made as the county commissioners back on May 7th where you made the motion and voted to allow us to continue up to the bid process. Tonight is going to be an update. We hope at the conclusion of this if you have questions we can answer them.

Rob Johnson, Boomerang Architects, presented an updated schematics, cost estimate and timeline. We are on track for February and March to get approvals done and then bidding publicly in April and awarding the project. The first summer there is work to do

to get the roof structure on and then occupy the new addition Summer 2020 and then the 300 pod renovation after that. The first summer we will get the two boilers and chillers demolished and replaced. Mr. Johnson updated the Boards on the new cost estimate. This is a sizeable job that is being done on a campus with young people so it is our opinion that you need someone that has done similar work and it is in the best interest of the project that the contractors should be prequalified.

Chair Hicks stated that back in April of last year we agreed on 19.5 million and now it is 23 million. Wood Hall Young, Jr. stated that he made the motion at that time not to exceed 19.5 million. Dennis Aldridge said "I thought \$330 dollars a foot was pretty bad and this is almost \$400. Mr. Johnson stated that this is marketplace driven.

John Greene, Chair of the Avery County Board of Education, stated that we have come to the point where we have kicked the can down the road for several years. The first time we were around 15 million. We are to the point where we need to decide. This is something that we all have agreed to in the past either in meetings and while we were campaigning. We are to the point where we are at a 50 year old school. The problem is not going to go away, it is just going to get more expensive. The Board of Education does not have the ability to pay for it. We come to you with what we need. It is more expensive but even what we are looking at here is not all we need. This is a bare bones thing. We need a whole lot more but that is on down the road.

We are to the point we need updated classroom space. We are living in 50 year old classrooms. Fortunately, back then they had a vision to build a new school. That vision they had 50 years ago has now fallen on us. It is a lot of money. Chair Hicks stated "you are talking about a lot of years to pay for it." Mr. Greene answered yes we are but are we going to be the ones to step up and do it? We did tie ourselves into the 19.5 million which at that point was a ballpark figure. We don't have any clue what it is going to be until we go out to bid. This school is older than the schools that were consolidated. This comes down to dollars and cents. We are bringing our proposals to you. We know it is up to you to decide how to pay for it. This is time sensitive. We don't want to break ground in October or November.

Kathy Aldridge stated that she felt like that the Board of Education was at the mercy of the Board of Commissioners. The commissioners have been so gracious to us. I don't want to wait until there is nothing left there to work with. We have the perfect set up. We need some security.

Dr. Taylor stated "we came to you last April with a good faith estimate. You asked me as the new superintendent what was my feeling and I talked to you about my experience with building schools and renovating schools and I talked about the fact that some of us go to Freedom Trail, Riverside and Banner Elk but we all go to Avery High. I talked about the fact that this plays a role in economic development. This is an investment in our community and in our future. The good faith estimate that we gave you in April is information. The only two things you see different is heating and cooling and electrical and when the experts come to you and say why are you going to build something new and then turn around and have something that needs to be replaced.

You listen to those folks. If we came to you and did not put that number up there and come six months later your question would be why did you build that when you knew that boiler needed to be replaced. The estimate we gave you in April was the information that we had. In November when the engineers actually got on site and began looking at the infrastructure of the school they said these are a couple of things that you need to be aware of and think about. So those were two big numbers. We did look at building two new classrooms or using the space that we had. That is an alternate; that is not in the base bid. These folks said you can build more space for possibly less money so we felt like that was a good idea. This is something that we need. In the ten months I have been here I hope I have demonstrated to you my ability to manage a budget and make tough decisions and make good decisions. We are not asking for the moon. We are not asking for bells and whistles. This is classroom space with ADA accessibility. This project has been value engineered. You asked us to come back and give you an update. Our mind has not changed. The need is still there. There is an inflationary piece to this. Construction is picking back up. It is only going to get more expensive. I am charged to represent the young people of Avery County and on behalf of the young people of Avery County I respectfully ask once again that this is a project we move forward with.”

Dennis Aldridge questioned “the 300 pod renovation as opposed to the way it was in the beginning is this included in the bid?” Mr. Johnson stated that it is an alternate and is in addition to that. Mr. Aldridge said if you say that covers the contingency then that does not cover the other contingency because you know there are going to be overruns on those. In actuality we are adding 1.4 million to the 23.1 million. Dr. Taylor said the 23.1 million includes 1.8 million in contingency and we are not guaranteed to spend those. I have built schools and renovated schools and sometimes you don’t have enough contingency and sometimes you use hardly any of the contingency. Mr. Aldridge stated so now we are up to 24.7 million. Dr. Taylor stated this was an alternate from the beginning.

Tim Phillips stated that he didn’t think anyone was surprised that this came in at 23.1 million because we have done two other projects and they both came in more than the first estimate. The bottom line is that it does need to be built. I don’t know how we are going to pay for it but it needs to be built.

Chair Hicks stated that she has heard for 15 years that we are going to have to build a school and I am not against building a school. If we get a loan for what we need to do which will probably be 15 or 20 years are we going to look at more problems before we get this paid off?

Mr. Greene said that working on the cafeteria is going to have to be addressed. This is the first phase.

Steve Smith commented that everything is out of date. We can update it. We don’t need as large a seating area but we need a larger kitchen area. A lot of the equipment is 30 plus years old.

Dr. Taylor stated that we can pay for those projects in a different economy scale. We can write a grant. We can try to request other types of funding to put down new floor, etc. That just needs to be updated. We are talking about renovating.

Mr. Aldridge stated that there is a harsh reality of economics that come into this. Based on my experience in doing projects, you will be another 5 to 10% overrun on this.

Dr. Taylor stated that he was not sure what could be cut from this. This is a rectangular building with no frills and an elevator. The common space makes sense. There are no bells and whistles in the classrooms. We have already cut from 28 to 24 classrooms. This is very straightforward. Mr. Johnson commented that until you get a hard bid number you don't know what it is going to be.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. stated that we have discussed several times about kicking the can down the road not just with the school system but also every other county department. I don't think there is one of us willing to put the taxpayers in debt for 30 years.

Dr. Taylor stated that we were asked to give you an estimate. We leaned on professionals to give us an estimate and it was 19.5 million. We are going to be as upfront as possible and have been as upfront as we can possibly be. I want you to know that I want you to trust me. That is the information we had in April and this is the information we have now.

Mr. Aldridge stated that 25% is a huge increase.

There was discussion about the 300 pod.

Chair Hicks said I think this gives us a lot to study about tonight. Tonight was not a night to take a vote on. This is something that the commissioners can ponder on and we can get back with you.

Dr. Taylor stated in May you gave us permission to go to bid. If the bid exceeded 19.5 million, you were not necessarily going to accept the contract. Are we still able to proceed with the process that we are working with to go to bid in April so that we can come back to you and say here is what the bids came back as. That is what the motion that you made on May 7, 2018 stated.

Kathy Aldridge said if this is not going to happen then just say it is not going to happen. Wood Hall Young, Jr. stated that we were turned down with the grant. Phillip and Tim are talking with private financial institutions and the USDA. Right now we are doing what we can do to try to find the money.

Mr. Aldridge said it is not a simple yes or no. If you are asking for that right now it is impossible to do that.

Mr. Barrier read the motion that was passed at the May Board of Commissioners meeting which stated that the Board gave the permission to proceed not to exceed 19.5 million dollars with the Board having the final decision. There was discussion about whether that meant to proceed to bid.

Mr. Phillips asked if there was a monetary sum that we are talking about to proceed to bid day. Is there something that has not been covered? Why can't we just let it go to bid? We can't answer no you can't build this school or yes you can until we know the number. Dr. Taylor stated that is what we thought the motion that was made was to proceed to bid. We have been working under that assumption. Mr. Aldridge stated that the anxiety comes from putting ourselves into a position where we don't have an escape clause where if we proceed we are committed to that regardless and that is what the reluctance is. Dr. Taylor said once you open the bids you do not have to accept the bids and there is no legal obligation.

Chris Campbell, Attorney for the Board of Education, stated that you are not under any obligation to proceed. Dr. Taylor stated that he would like to see what a contractor says we can do this project for.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. questioned if the furniture and fixtures line item could be reduced because the furniture and equipment for the science labs had only been purchased year before last and it was the understanding of the Board that this equipment would be reused in the new high school addition. Dr. Taylor stated he was not here when that took place but he would reassure the Board that anything that can be reused we are open to do what we can.

Dr. Taylor questioned "ok for clarification for me we are ok to proceed to prequalify bidders and to prepare to go to bid to determine an amount that we can bring back to you." Chair Hicks stated that she thought that we had already voted for that. Tim Phillips stated that he did to and that is the route that we had decided to do.

Adjourn

Motion by Tim Phillips and second by Dennis Aldridge to adjourn this meeting at 7:14 p.m. Motion unanimously approved with those in attendance (4-0).

John Greene commented that he appreciated how both boards can come together and talk candidly.

Motion by Kathy Aldridge (Board of Education) and second by Jan Bumgarner (Board of Education) to adjourn the meeting at 7:14 p.m. Motion unanimously approved (5-0).

Martha Hicks, Chair
Avery County Board of Commissioners

Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk