

**Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education &
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners
Joint Meeting
January 31, 2022**

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CALL TO ORDER

1. Welcome
2. Public Comment
3. Presentation by Board of Education / Transylvania County Schools
4. Joint Board Discussion
5. Next Steps
6. Public Comment
7. Board of Education Comments
8. Board of Commissioners Comments

ADJOURNMENT

The Transylvania County Board of Education met jointly with the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners at 6:00 p.m. on January 31, 2022 in the Commissioners' Chambers at the Transylvania County Administration Building. Chairman Jason Chappell gave an invocation and Vice Chairman Ron Kiviniemi led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Chappell called the Board of Commissioners meeting to order. Vice Chair Kiviniemi called the Board of Education meeting to order. In addition to approximately 25 guests, the following board members, staff and others were in attendance.

BOARD OF EDUCATION:

Tawny McCoy, Chair (remote)
Ron Kiviniemi, Vice Chair
Courtney Domokur
Marty Griffin
Kimsey Jackson

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS:

Jason Chappell, Chair
Jake Dalton, Vice Chair
Larry Chapman
David Guice
Teresa McCall

STAFF:

Dr. Jeff McDaris, Superintendent
Jenny Hunter, Administrative Assistant

STAFF:

Jamie Laughter, County Manager
Kate Hayes, Administrative Assistant

SCHOOL BOARD ATTORNEY:

Chris Campbell, Campbell Shatley

COUNTY ATTORNEY:

Bill Bulfer, Teague Campbell

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER:

Scott Thomas

MEDIA:

Alex Perri, Transylvania Times
Dan DeWitt, Brevard NewsBeat

PRESENTERS:

Chad Roberson, Clark Nexsen Architects
Brian Walker, Vannoy Construction

1. Welcome

Chairman Chappell and Vice Chairman Kiviniemi gave welcoming remarks and introduced the board members and staff in attendance. Mr. Kiviniemi reported that Chairman McCoy was joining the meeting remotely due to illness. Chairman Chappell stated that no vote would be taken at this meeting.

2. Public Comment

Chairman Chappell recognized two speakers. Excerpts from their comments are listed below.

Chris Weiner, parent - I have five kids at Brevard Middle School and Brevard High School. I am concerned about the impact of changes to the BHS fine arts program. I am concerned about revisions to RHS as well. Rosman High is most in need of work. I recommend that you fully fund RHS. Living behind fences is detrimental to students' health. I recommend that you remove any plans to encapsulate programs.

Meredith Licht, teacher - Thank you for coming together to talk about the bond plans. This is my 20th year teaching at Brevard High School. In my years at BHS, I have seen a great deal of support for our schools from county commissioners. I have also seen our capital needs compound over time. The bond will go a long way toward addressing that. It is not perfect, but it is impossible to please everyone. The plans represent the work of the board of education, the bond committee and the architects to fulfill the vision voted upon by our community. The plans represent a fraction of our system's total needs. I urge you to come together in a spirit of cooperation and I urge the commissioners to support the plans because the improvements are sorely needed.

3. Presentation by Board of Education

Dr. McDaris presented an overview of school infrastructure needs and bond planning planning. Brevard High, Rosman High and Rosman Middle were identified as the schools having the greatest needs. A \$68 million bond for improvements to these three schools was approved by an overwhelming majority of voters in November 2018. In December 2018, a memorandum of understanding between the board of education and the board of commissioners was developed. A joint meeting was held in January 2019 to discuss the MOU and hear a presentation by the School of Government confirming aspects of the bond process. The MOU was approved in February 2019 and a joint bond committee including county commissioners, school board members, and school representatives was established. In February 2019, the board released RFPs for architectural and construction manager at risk (CMAR) services. The bond committee heard presentations by architectural firms and CMAR candidates in April 2019. Clark Nexsen was selected as the architectural firm and Vannoy Construction was selected as CMAR. Pre-construction work was begun.

Chad Roberts from Clark Nexsen discussed the status of the bond projects now. He reported that the global COVID-19 pandemic hit the construction industry with unprecedented supply chain issues and cost increases for labor and materials. Prices jumped approximately 17% over initial bids and are continuing to rise with no end in sight. The volatile market and rising costs created a need to modify the scope of work for the projects while addressing the original goals established for the three schools. The architect and CMAR team presented new options to the board on December 7, 2021. The board reviewed the options and voted to move forward with Option 1 at both campuses. Contract amendments were drawn up and on January 24, 2022, the school board approved the amended contracts and sent the contracts to the board of commissioners for approval. The contracts await their signature.

4. Joint Board Discussion

Commissioners asked a number questions about the Option 1 modifications. Mr. Chappell asked whether the revised plans would exceed \$68 million. Dr. McDaris confirmed that the \$68 million cap has not changed. Mr. Kiviniemi reported that the board spent hours deliberating and choosing the best option going forward. Option 1

was selected for both campuses because it includes the most new construction and designs that are closest to the originals. He stated that the board of education is asking the board of commissioners to approve the amended contracts as soon as possible because every week that goes by is time lost to increased prices and delayed construction. He quoted from Chairman McCoy's letter of January 26, 2022 to the board of commissioners which states, "Simply put, we truly feel that Option 1 is the best course of action for our school district, and valuable time is slipping away. We respectfully ask for a vote from the county with regards to Option 1 as soon as possible."

Commissioners asked about additional design fees for the new plans. Dr. McDaris reported that the architects have been operating on the fee schedule from last year. The fee schedule is detailed in the amended contracts of which the commissioners have copies. Mrs. Domokur noted that if board should have to change course and start over, it would cost much more due to the need for a new architect and construction manager selection process, new plans and specifications, the cost of bidding the work, and the loss of significant time while construction costs continue to rise.

Mr. Chappell asked about time frames. Mr. Roberson stated that the new schedules will depend on how soon the contract amendments are approved by the commissioners. Mr. Chapman asked how confident they are that the new bids will come in as planned and not go up again. Mr. Roberson reported that they have calculated their estimates based on the current market realities and with additional escalations as contingencies. Mr. Chappell asked if supply chain issues are still happening in commercial building projects. Brian Walker, Vannoy Construction, reported that supply issues are affecting all building markets.

Mrs. McCall asked a series of questions about the revised budgets and contingency amounts for RHS/RMS and BHS. Mr. Roberson reported roughly \$30 million with \$3 million escalation contingencies on top of planned site escalation for BHS and roughly \$31 million with \$6 million escalation contingencies for RHS/RMS. Mrs. McCall asked what area would have changed the most conceptually from what was originally envisioned. Mr. Roberson reported that the amount of renovation is the area most changed. Mrs. McCall asked how much in additional funding would be needed to do the projects as originally planned. Mr. Kiviniemi estimated \$17 million. Mr. Roberson clarified that was in yesterday's dollars; it most likely would be more now. Mr. Chapman asked if there are would be any legal issues associated with the public getting less than expected. Attorney Campbell stated that in his opinion it would not be an issue but encouraged the commissioners to consult their bond counsel.

Mr. Roberson shared a PowerPoint presentation showing what Option 1 would look like on both campuses. He reviewed the components and answered questions from the commissioners. Mr. Guice asked about the fencing issue that was raised earlier. Dr. McDaris reported that while the schools do not want to look like a prison, it is necessary to balance openness with security for our students and staff. Dashes shown on the conceptual drawings could represent fencing or a wall to make sure people cannot wander onto campus during school hours. Mr. Griffin reported that the goal is to have one secure entrance at each school. We have over 60 doors currently. All of the planned new construction is based on improving safety. Mr. Kiviniemi added that the drop-off zone next to Highway 64 at RHS is another safety concern. The plans address that as well.

Mrs. McCall asked about change orders that may arise when demolition starts. Mr. Roberson reported there are allowances in the contracts for unforeseen factors, and they

will be part of the bid packages. Mrs. McCall asked if structural engineers will review for potential dangers. Mr. Roberson reported that is included.

Mr. Guice asked if there is a possibility of getting any state or federal funding that could make up the shortfall and allow us to get all of what we wanted. Dr. McDaris reported there has been some talk of a statewide bond, but the Senate is not likely to approve that based on past actions. Mr. Guice stated that he favors an approach of determining what is best for the community and mapping out a path forward for all projects.

Mr. Kiviniemi stated that both boards realize that if the NC General Assembly lived up to its statutory responsibility to adequately fund current expense, more money would be freed up for capital outlay. He would like to see both boards work together to address this moving forward. He reiterated that the school board is committed to Option 1 at both campuses and urged the commissioners to approve the contracts as soon as possible so that work can get underway.

Mr. Chapman stated that he feels there is no worse time to take on a construction project of this magnitude and that until the pandemic subsides, he does not see the urgency. He asked if the commissioners feel they are prepared to go back to the citizens for more money in the future. He also stated that people are blaming the commissioners for delaying the projects and went on record to say that the county has not done anything to delay.

5. **Next Steps**

Chairman Chappell asked the commissioners to send any additional questions to the county manager who would collect and send them to the school board. He also suggested having smaller scale joint meetings for further discussion. He stated that the commissioners are very interested in the projects and want to make sure they are done right.

6. **Comments from Board of Education & Board of Commissioners**

Mr. Dalton stated that about two years ago the commissioners received a list of needed capital improvements for the schools totaling \$98 million that included HVAC, roofs, etc. He asked if any of that has changed. Mr. Kiviniemi reported that some of the projects have been addressed through the yearly capital outlay allotment and others will be addressed as funding permits.

Mrs. McCall stated that as a former board of education member and chairman, she understands working through a bond and being transparent with the public. She stated that she dedicated 12 years to the schools and does not want anyone to misunderstand how much she values the students or what she requires from every department within the county, which is good stewardship of county dollars. She believes it is the intent of all members to move forward and find the best solutions for the students of this county, and that asking the hard questions is how we get there.

Mr. Jackson stated that he is a Transylvania native who worked his entire career in Florida and brings a corporate view. He stated that he has the same concerns as Mr. Chapman that it is not a great time to start a construction project. However, the schools need attention. Three years is a long time not to put a shovel in the ground. But if we don't do it now, then when? His son works in construction and echoes what Vannoy says, that normal is not coming back. So, even with these concerns and knowing that we will not get all that we wanted, he requests that the commissioners sign the amended contracts so that the projects can get moving again. No more delays. He emphasized

that the board cannot move forward if it does not have the money to do so, and the commissioners are the ones that make that possible.

Mr. Guice thanked the board of education for meeting and sharing information. He stated that in his role as a commissioner, with two terms in the state legislature and 40 years in law enforcement, he knows difficult decisions. He has grandchildren in the school system and a wife who works at a school and knows the needs are real. He stated that no one created the situation we are in now and thinks it is wrong to try and blame someone. Doing big projects always creates challenges. In his career, he always heard why don't you ask the people? With the bond referendum, we did ask the community, and 60% of our voters supported it. He thinks the board can expect a response from the commissioners fairly quickly.

Mr. Chapman stated that he is not opposed to the bond; his only concern is doing it in a bad economy.

Mr. Kiviniemi stated that the board would like the commissioners to approve the contracts for the CMAR and architect after they get the answers to their additional questions. But if they are not ready to do that, he would ask that they give the board a detailed alternative plan for moving forward.

An unidentified member of the audience spoke out and said that the revised plans would give the voters a large percentage (70%) of what they asked for.

Mr. Griffin observed a number of distinguished graduates from both high schools present in the room. Our superintendent is a product of Transylvania County Schools. He stated that he is proud to know that so many people are where they are today due to the education they received in this county. He urged that we keep up our school system as something to be proud of.

7. Public Comment

There was a second opportunity for public comment. Excerpts are listed below.

Emmet Casciato - Do you see a decrease or increase in student population or will it stay level? Dr. McDaris replied that if economic conditions in the county stay the way they are, it is more difficult to attract young families. He feels that water and sewer infrastructure improvements will help increase enrollment. People are interested in relocating here, but factors such as jobs and housing are barriers. Mr. Casciato asked if the new construction will make schools safer, what are we doing now to keep students safe? He feels we can't keep going to the well and asking citizens for tax increases. The commissioners have to think about the courthouse too. That will hit citizens once again.

Chris Weiner - I would expect the board to request revision marks on plans going forward. Can we revoke the bond and readdress the changes? What improvements in education are being achieved by this construction? How do the BHS changes not being utilized for students do that? Our concern is to make sure we have educational space conducive to learning. Our future is dependent on the quality of our students. We need to educate kids for the local job market. As a taxpayer, I would rather get another pass at funding this. We should go back and fully address everything. It may not be the best time to do this as Larry says. I would rather have a larger bond to address all needs.

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MRS. MCCALL, SECONDED BY MR. DALTON, the board of commissioner meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:48 p.m. ON A MOTION BY MR. GRIFFIN, SECONDED BY MR. JACKSON, the board of education meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary