Virginia:

AT A CONTINUED MEETING of the Nelson County Board of Supervisors at 1:00 p.m. in the Former Board of Supervisors Room located on the fourth floor of the Nelson County Courthouse, in Lovingston, Virginia.

Present: Ernie Q. Reed, Central District Supervisor – Chair
Dr. Jessica L. Ligon, South District Supervisor – Vice Chair
Jesse N. Rutherford, East District Supervisor
J. David Parr, West District Supervisor
Candice W. McGarry, County Administrator
Amanda B. Spivey, Administrative Assistant/Deputy Clerk
Grace E. Mawyer, Director of Finance and Human Resources

Absent: Thomas D. Harvey, North District Supervisor

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Reed called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. with four (4) Supervisors present to establish a quorum. Mr. Harvey was absent.

II. CLOSED SESSION PURSUANT TO §2.2-3711 (A)(1)

Dr. Ligon moved that the Nelson County Board of Supervisors convene in closed session to discuss the following as permitted by the Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1) – "Discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidates for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body," – Personnel. Mr. Parr seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Supervisors approved the motion unanimously (4-0) by roll call vote.

Supervisors conducted the closed session and upon conclusion, Mr. Parr moved to reconvene in public session. Mr. Rutherford seconded the motion and there being no further discussion, Supervisors voted unanimously (4-0) by roll call vote to approve the motion.

Upon reconvening in public session, Dr. Ligon moved that the Nelson County Board of Supervisors certify that, in the closed session just concluded, nothing was discussed except the matter or matters specifically identified in the motion to convene in closed session and lawfully permitted to be discussed under the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act cited in that motion. Mr. Parr seconded the motion and there being no further discussion, Supervisors voted unanimously (4-0) by roll call vote to approve the motion.

III. FY26 BUDGET WORK SESSION

Ms. McGarry indicated that the two items being discussed during the meeting were School Funding and MACAA funding. She noted that they wanted to make sure they were clear on the MACAA funding. Mr. Rutherford asked if the $25,000 had been taken away from MACAA. Ms. McGarry noted that shift in funding would just need to take place in the budget documents and it would not affect the bottom line. Mr. Rutherford confirmed that he was fine with that $25,000 going to the program proposed by the Nelson County Community Development Foundation. Mr. Parr noted that Ms. Clair had initially asked for $30,000, but said that she could make $25,000 work. The Board was in consensus for the movement of $25,000 in funds from MACAA to NCCDF for the Family Assistance Program.

a. School Funding

Ms. McGarry stated that part of their discussion today would be consideration of shifting some of the funding from the $1 million dollars for operations to another school bus.

Mr. Parr said that they have never held in-depth conversations about the school's budget—even though it makes up 55% of the County's budget—so while they've had a presentation on it, they have not as a Board discussed any adjustments they would like to make. Ms. McGarry noted that it had generally been discussed and staff had tried to prompt the Board to discuss it. Ms. Parr said they have not gone through the School budget, line item by line item, like they do with every other budget. He noted that as a Board, they have not discussed any adjustments that they would like to see.

Mr. Reed stated that if there were concerns, they should have been brought up prior to the public hearing so citizens would know what they as a Board intended.

Mr. Parr commented that if they are going to use words like "should have been," then Mr. Reed as chairman should have brought up the School Board's budget in one of the Board meetings to discuss. Mr. Reed said that the School budget was brought up. Mr. Parr said it was not talked about in depth, and it was 55 percent of the County's budget. He cited an example of the superintendent giving herself a more than 4.49% raise when a memo from the School Division stated that all administrative employees were getting 2.61%—effectively increasing her salary from $171,000 to $179,273. He noted that there were employees in the School Division who were getting a 2.5% raise. Mr. Reed stated that it was the School Board who gave the superintendent the salary increase, not the superintendent.

Mr. Parr stated that he was on the School Board for 16 years, noting that he knew how the School budget worked. He explained that the assistant superintendent and superintendent develop the budget and give it to the School Board to approve. He noted that he was citing the salary increase as an example of where he thought there were opportunities, and why things are done in that budget. He commented that there were other people who were at around two percent (2%), and the athletic director and trainer are given roughly eight percent raises. He said he was frustrated because the salary increases were advertised as three percent for support staff, 2.9 percent for teachers and 2.6 percent for administrative staff, but when you get into the budget, those are just averages because there are some numbers that are much higher than that. He confirmed that the Board did not dictate how the School Division used their money, the Board provides a flat dollar amount. He noted a 5.2 percent increase for the Director of Instruction's salary. He added that the $314,296 he found on the surface could provide for two buses. He commented that there was still room in the School budget to function. He felt that there was definitely room in the budget to allocate $150,000 for an extra bus and move it to capital. Mr. Reed agreed that the Schools could definitely use an extra bus. Mr. Parr clarified that he is not advocating taking $300,000 away from schools and putting it in the General Fund.

Mr. Rutherford recalled that after their joint Board of Supervisors-School Board meeting, they had directed staff to have correspondence with the Schools about what they can do to establish $150,000 as a recurring bus fund. He said that he has been in conversations with his School Board member, and he asked if others had done the same. Mr. Parr responded that he reached out twice to George Cheape trying to get a meeting and has not received a reply. Dr. Ligon confirmed that she had spoken to Ceaser Perkins and Mr. Reed noted he had spoken with George Cheape. Mr. Rutherford noted that they needed to speak to everyone. Mr. Reed commented that Mr. Cheape been the one to suggest a $150,000 bus fund as a possible solution to the school bus issue.

Ms. McGarry said she did talk to Dr. Hester about it, and the School Board had discussed at their meeting the previous week the need to identify $150,000 to create the funds for another bus, as the Board of Supervisors had suggested. She noted that the School Board did not go into detail on what that would look like, other than they would need to start looking at it.

Mr. Rutherford stated that he has interacted with both school staff and School Board members, and he surmises that because buses are in operating this year instead of capital, they had misinterpreted this as a recurring fund. He suggested that they needed to replace at least four buses per year, probably five per year to catch up on a replacement schedule. He said if they could come up with a fund He said the goal is for them both to utilize non-recurring funds to bridge that gap the following year, such as cost savings related to salaries. He said this might not necessarily be part of a recurring bus fund, but it helps bridge that gap.

Ms. McGarry said that in the past, if the Schools had leftover funds at the end of the year, they've come back to the Board to ask about using that for a specific purpose—which she did not think needed to change.

Mr. Rutherford agreed, adding that they needed to start pricing in something into permanency, which the County did not have the funds this year to be able to price in an additional bus yet until the next budget session. He emphasized that the Schools should be able to carve $150,000 out of a $33 million budget in the short term, but he also wants the Schools to come back with a strategy for a recurring bus fund that also contemplates inflation. He added that ideally, they would manage the fund, but the County could also do that if needed.

Dr. Ligon expressed concern about other big-ticket items in the next two years, one of them being the HVAC at Rockfish, which probably will have to be addressed this coming fiscal year— she said the Board is actually asking them to find $1,150,000 when also considering the $1 million for the HVAC.

Ms. McGarry said it's likely that will have to be financed in some way, given that level of funding, although there might be some cash on hand.

Mr. Reed pointed out that with the Title I, III, III, and IV funds, it's very possible that the Schools will end up with a significant shortfall from that area, and they are not going to have flexibility if they are on the hook for the $150,000 as they may need that to uphold basic staffing and services. He added that he is in favor of looking into allocating $150,000 as a one-time bus purchase, and noted that management of a long-term fund depends on who wants to have the authority. Mr. Rutherford said he preferred for the Schools to manage the bus fund so that County staff were not overburdened. Dr. Ligon commented that they had not been purchasing buses. Mr. Rutherford and Mr. Parr noted that the Schools used grant funds to purchase electric buses. Ms. McGarry indicated that the Schools only purchase buses if the Board gives them money for the buses.

Dr. Ligon mentioned the use of electric buses and how disastrous that had been because the buses could not cover the entire route distance as expected. She noted that routes had to be changed as a result. She also commented that the colder temperatures affected the electric buses. Mr. Reed noted that the electric buses did not fit every scenario that the other buses could do. He said it was not a disaster but a limitation.

Ms. McGarry noted the federal funding issue that Mr. Reed brought up and said at the recent School Board meeting, they estimated a possible figure of $132,000 that could be lost in federal funding, which would mean $282,000 when coupled with the $150,000.

Mr. Rutherford asked about Title I funding for free and reduced lunches and whether that was impacted following COVID. Dr. Ligon responded that all kids currently get free and reduced lunches because of the number of them who meet poverty guidelines. Ms. McGarry clarified that the CEP impacts food services funding, and if the way that is calculated changes and it puts the County over a certain threshold, then not everyone would receive free lunch, and they would have go back to the free and reduced lunch application program in place previously. She added that her understanding is that it is breakfast and lunch for every student.

Mr. Rutherford commented that this was something perhaps that the community would be involved in, such as donations.

Mr. Reed suggested that they go back to the Schools and say that the Board's intention is to see a bus fund setup for one (1) bus per year, $175,000. He said that the options are that explain that either entity can set up the bus fund—but if the Schools elect not to, the Board wants to include it in the County budget this year. He said this would ensure that they get a bus but would not provide control of the fund, at least in the short term.

Mr. Rutherford said if they get one bus now and price in a few more over the next few years, that would take care of the issue. Mr. Reed agreed but said he does not want to give the perception that the Board would be backing out the cost of a bus from the regular School Board budget each year, and this would give staff time to discuss this with the Schools. Mr. Rutherford suggested that County and School staff interact, while Board members interact with the School Board members and bring back an update at the June meeting. Mr. Reed noted they were looking to continue the meeting to the following week. Ms. McGarry confirmed that the plan was for staff to come back to the June Board meeting with a plan on how the bus fund would work.

Ms. McGarry said School staff may need to meet with the School Board again before making that decision. She noted that the School Board meeting would take place after the Board of Supervisors meeting in June. She asked if there was interest in having the Schools attend the Board of Supervisors meeting the following week.

Mr. Parr commented that the Schools real budget work begins once the Board of Supervisors gives them a number. Ms. McGarry said it sounded like the discussion they were having did not change the School budget's bottom line. Mr. Parr agreed that was correct at this point. He commented that the Board doesn't tell the Schools how to spend their money, but there was money in there that was not needed.

Dr. Ligon stated that there are some local governments in which the Board of Supervisors does guide how the school funding would be spent, and Ms. McGarry confirmed that this was possible.

Dr. Ligon asked about the status of space needs for all of the departments located in the courthouse. She noted that one of the ideas, and the School Board was preparing themselves for the Board to say, that the School Board needed to find a new location. She indicated that when she spoke with Mr. Cheape, he said that the Board needed tell them something sooner rather than later, because the ideal time to relocate was summertime.

Ms. McGarry noted that staff was gathering that information and it would take time. She said they needed to know where the School Board office can go, noting that was the first domino. Dr. Ligon responded that the actual needs should be the first domino. Ms. McGarry noted that there was currently no other place for the Commonwealth Attorney's office to go to within the Courthouse, unless the ideal space is the School Board office. She said that the Commonwealth Attorney's office cannot move into that space until the School Board relocates somewhere else. Dr. Ligon stated that they were having "paralysis by analysis" and said that they just needed to know what the needs are. She asked to be presented with the needs so that they can then discuss some solutions.

Mr. Parr stated that staff shouldn't be taking on the responsibility of the Schools to find space. Dr. Ligon commented that they needed to know the needs of the Courthouse, not the needs of the Schools. Mr. Parr said they could be empathetic to the needs of the Schools, but they do not need to solve it. Mr. Reed suggested that both entities discuss it together to yield better options. Ms. McGarry noted that she had been discussing the issue with Dr. Hester. She said the School Board and staff needed to know what kind of timeframe they were working with.

Mr. Parr said in his mind, the timeframe was Summer 2026, as it definitely was not happening in Summer 2025.

Ms. McGarry clarified that the Board was looking for all the needs of everyone in the courthouse, not just the school division.

Mr. Parr commented that he felt it was a pretty obvious swap to have the Commonwealth's Attorney, Victim Witness, and possibly Recovery Court staff move into the School Board space, because they do utilize the Former Board Room for court needs. He noted that they did not need to involve the Commissioner of Revenue and Treasurer as they would not be moving. He suggested that they would then see what County office could relocate into the Commonwealth Attorney's current office space in the Jefferson building. He emphasized that the study needs to be on when the Commonwealth Attorney vacates that space, how they use it.

Dr. Ligon stated that she wants to make sure they look at the space needs comprehensively in the event that an office were to receive additional funding and positions. Mr. Rutherford suggested that they would likely get quick responses from departments like the Treasurer and Commissioner. Mr. Reed suggested that they say the draft timeline is Summer 2026.

Mr. Parr said they're not going to be expanding the building, and his timeline for the information is by end of December 2025, with plans in motion during Summer 2026. Mr. Reed suggested that they also consider what spaces may be appropriate for the School Board to relocate to. Mr. Parr contemplated whether all the school administrative staff members need to be housed under the same roof, as they have different functions. He suggested that some positions could easily be housed in the high school's CTE area as they oversaw that program. He noted that the School Superintendent and School Finance needed to be located together. Mr. Reed commented that JABA would be happy to sell the Nelson Center.

Ms. McGarry clarified that staff is collecting all the space needs for the courthouse, and the priority for School Division space needs is a timeline for action by next summer. She noted that the School Board had concerns regarding who would pay the cost for them to relocate. Mr. Reed noted that was something that would need to be discussed. Ms. McGarry said following the Commonwealth's Attorney vacating the current space, the priority is figuring out who will go in there and what could be done with any leftover space. She confirmed that the Sheriff's Department has suggested moving their investigative division into that area once the Commonwealth Attorney vacates the space. She asked if, in the meantime, they could look at any temporary measures to make the space for the Commonwealth's Attorney flow any better. Mr. Parr noted that if they made any changes to that space, the next office to occupy it may need a totally different setup. Mr. Parr and Dr. Ligon suggested that they make no changes for the time being.

Revisiting the school budget, Mr. Parr commented that the schools' presentation did not match up with some of their numbers. He said for example, the schools say they are adding an elementary teacher, an assistant principal, and a special education self-contained teacher—but they are also proposing a six-figure administrative position. He explained that the schools are using monies from unfilled vacancies in the current fiscal year that should be short-term expenses but instead it is earmarked for long-term plans. Mr. Parr mentioned a new truancy position that would be based on the high school, which would be permanent.

Mr. Parr said that while the school budget talks about a "2.9% targeted pay raise for teachers," there is a wide variance in what some positions are getting—up to 10.58% in some cases. He also mentioned the ZeroEyes membership at an annual cost of $72,000, noting that it is a radar system type of metal detector that can spot a weapon within three seconds. Mr. Rutherford said that type of equipment can also "expire" and require expensive replacement.

Mr. Parr reiterated that he was not one to rubber stamp a million-dollar request for increase in funding just because they say they needed it, and he had concerns about support staff making $15,000 a year and getting a tiny raise when administrators were getting big dollar amounts and big percentage increases. He said the Board does not control how the Schools allocate that money, but they do control the amount that they give.

Mr. Reed said he was sympathetic to what Mr. Parr was saying, but he disagreed because there were opportunities to bring this up earlier and have this discussion prior to putting a budget forth for the public—and no one took the opportunity to bring it up.

Mr. Parr responded that it's the chairman's job to direct the conversation, and he sat back and patiently waited for a school budget conversation, but that didn't happen until he specifically requested it. Mr. Reed said if Board members didn't bring it up when appropriate, that was not his fault.

Mr. Parr stated that it's appropriate now, as they have until June 30th.

Mr. Reed said the public would not have an opportunity to comment on this, nor does it give the schools an opportunity to respond.

Dr. Ligon pointed out that the public has the opportunity to speak at any meeting, and she noted that the turnout for the actual budget public hearing was nominal.

Mr. Parr noted that the difference between 3% and 4.49% with the superintendent's raise represented $2,554. He added that while the total amount may not be noteworthy, the principle behind this process concerns him. He said he was somewhere around $800,000, not $1 million, and then they could deduct a bus from that. Dr. Ligon emphasized that she is more "pro teacher" than "pro School Board" and it infuriated her to see the differences in raise percentages. She said she had a big problem with the amount of money that goes to administration, noting that was not just a Nelson County problem. Mr. Parr stated that he would rather see teachers and support staff receive a five percent increase, to include bus drivers, teaching assistants and cafeteria staff. Dr. Ligon noted that the support staff were our local people who have lived here a very long time.

Mr. Reed stated that he disagrees, as they have just gone through a self-performance evaluation, and the school is the biggest employer in the County. He said they have a large staff and a lot of responsibilities, and he felt that Dr. Hester, as the person in charge of that, needed to be rewarded for the good work that she does. He said in the same way that the County wanted to retain its top-level personnel, the School Board was in the same position with that and he was not opposed to the budget as presented.

Mr. Parr said that Mr. Reed has always voted in favor of fully funding the school budget, and while he understand Mr. Reed's educational background, he himself had been a School Board member for 16 years and knows that budget presented has room for adjustment—and if not, shame on the person who presented it, because you have to plan for things that might come up during the year.

Mr. Reed asked how the Board would like to proceed with this and whether they should meet with the Schools again. Dr. Ligon asked if the School Board could report on how things would work if they were to lose the Title I Federal Funding for School lunches and they have to revert back to the income based program. She asked if the Schools could provide what those costs would look like. Mr. Parr noted that he thought the Cafeteria Fund was always a self-supporting line in the budget prior to COVID and free lunch. Ms. McGarry noted that the Schools indicated that they felt they would not be affected by the CEP change in FY26, but it could be jeopardy for FY27. She noted that the Schools would still need to determine how to address that.

Mr. Reed asked the Board for their thoughts on inviting the School administration to the next meeting or if it would be more appropriate to tell the Schools the intention of the Board and have them report back.

Board members expressed concern that they already had several long meetings on the calendar, and at this point, the most helpful approach would be for the Schools to have a conversation about how they can make this work and report back to the Board. The Board also agreed that they should spend more time next year on diving into the School Board budget, as they spent significant time on things like EMS vehicles.

b. MACAA Funding

There was no further discussion on this item.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS (AS PRESENTED)

There was no other business presented.

V. ADJOURN AND CONTINUE TO MAY 21, 2025 AT 4:00 P.M.

At 2:34 p.m., Mr. Rutherford moved to adjourn and continue the meeting to May 21, 2026 at 4:00 p.m. Mr. Parr seconded the motion, which passed unanimously (4–0) by roll call vote and the meeting adjourned.