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Virginia:

AT A CONTINUED JOINT MEETING of the Nelson County Board of Supervisors and the Nelson County School Board at 4:00 p.m. in the Nelson Middle School Auditorium located in Lovingston Virginia.

Present: Jesse N. Rutherford, East District Supervisor – Vice Chair
Thomas D. Harvey, North District Supervisor
Ernie Q. Reed, Central District Supervisor – Chair
J. David Parr, West District Supervisor
Robert G. “Skip” Barton, South District Supervisor
Stephen A. Carter, County Administrator
Grace Mawyer, Administrative Assistant/Deputy Clerk
Candice W. McGarry, Director of Finance and Human Resources

Absent: None

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Reed called the meeting to order at 4:06 pm, with all Supervisors present to establish a quorum. Mr. Cheape led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. WELCOME AND STATEMENTS FROM THE BOARD CHAIRS

Mr. Reed noted that himself and Mr. Cheape will tag team facilitation of the meeting. He then recognized Ms. Shannon Irving representing the School Administration and Mr. Steve Carter and Ms. Candy McGarry representing County Administration.

Mr. Cheape welcomed everyone and thanked Mr. Reed as well as both boards for making it possible to come together and meet. He advised that this will be a pretty open agenda and open discussion whereas everyone will have an opportunity to speak. He then thanked members of both the County Staff and School Staff for coming this evening.

III. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Mr. Barton: Mr. Barton noted that he appreciates what the School Board has done during the crisis of the pandemic and the unintended consequences of the testing and No Child Left Behind business. He stated that it is possible with our resources to have a great school system, adding that he thinks we should aspire to that.

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Ms. Clair: Ms. Clair asked how the boards should go about talking to each other on a regular basis going forward. She noted that they used to do the two by two meetings, and they need to keep the line of communication open. She urged that the boards focus on short and long term planning and capital projects. She then noted that one of their challenges is declining enrollment and reiterated the need to keep lines of communication open so that they can try to make plans that work for both the schools and the County. She addressed Mr. Barton's comments and noted that they are all trying as hard as they can to make the schools the best they possibly can be, adding that comes from the heart and not from the wallet a lot of the time.

Mr. Parr: Mr. Parr noted that these meetings between the two boards are very important for communication and the success of both boards. He stated that he is looking forward to when they can have some less formal meetings where they can just be together and having a conversation, adding that's where the real work takes place. He noted that two by twos are great, and he thinks that they are getting to a point with Covid that some of them may be more comfortable than others continuing to have these two by two meetings. He advised that he is willing to do this if anybody else is willing, adding that they would be safe and social distance of course. He reiterated that the meetings between the two boards are imperative as well as conversations across the boards. He spoke of the community that they have as board members and the need to capitalize on that.

Ms. Turner-Giles: Ms. Turner-Giles noted her excitement that this meeting is taking place and agreed with Mr. Parr's comments, adding it is critical that the two boards talk, work together, and share information. She thanked the Board of Supervisors for the support they have given the School Board and noted her appreciation for her conversations and communication with Mr. Harvey. Regarding a next step going forward, she advised that she would love to set up annual or quarterly meetings with the two boards. She added that capital and strategic planning are top agenda items, and they can start looking at all of the projects that they have, as some of them have been on the list for a long time. She noted it would be nice if they could have a three to five-year plan or a similar timetable for fulfilling the projects.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Rutherford echoed thanks to the hard-working school employees during the pandemic and to the Chairman for arranging this joint meeting. He noted that one of his biggest priorities moving forward is supporting career and technical education in Nelson County. He added that he is grateful for the Board of Supervisors and Broadband Authority for their efforts in being one of the first municipalities to secure universal internet, and the next step is figuring out how to attract industry into Nelson County and make this an affordable place for people to want to live and have a career. He asked staff what the state is expecting on the pupil situation and also noted that he realizes capital improvements is a big concern. He advised that he would like to model after Greene County, which has a Board of Supervisors and School Board joint committee. He suggested having two Board of Supervisors members and two School Board members come together and discuss capital improvements, adding that he supports creating this committee. He then advised that another issue in Nelson County is

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housing and access to affordable housing. He also noted that he wishes to continue doing the two by two meetings.

Ms. Powell: Ms. Powell noted that she is appreciative to be a part of this joint board meeting. She advised that she believes they are way more symbiotic than they realize, and they really all do want what's best for the kids as well as what's best for the county. She noted that they all have continued concerns on strategic planning, pupil enrollment, and open communication. She agreed with Mr. Rutherford's suggestion of creating a capital improvement committee and noted it is a great idea.

Mr. Harvey: Mr. Harvey stated that until we can get the school operating budget under control, we can forget about capital plans. He advised that the state funding requirement right now is about \$7.5 million, and the County is producing another \$7.5 million of County money on top of that. He noted that the School Board is now asking for about \$800,000 in addition as well as hiring more people, adding that they have asked for more than what our taxes will produce. He stressed that people in the county can only afford so much, adding that some people are living off of social security or fixed incomes. Regarding new teaching positions, he noted that some of them may be funded by the state for the first year, but then they are dumped onto the County. He noted that there are ways to get the budget under control, and it's not always throwing money at it.

Mr. Perkins: Mr. Perkins had no comments.

Mr. Reed: Mr. Reed noted that he agrees with what everyone has said and is very proud of the schools and what the administration and School Board does. He stated that his overarching goal is quality of education, adding that the Board of Supervisors does have the ability to set the tone. He noted his belief that decisions about where financial resources are spent are best made by the School Board and not the Board of Supervisors. He stated that he likes the fact that money left over in the school budget at the end of the year can go towards capital, adding that he thinks this is a really good thing.

Mr. Cheape: Mr. Cheape asked Ms. Irving about the projected number of enrollments for next year. She advised the projected number is 1507, adding that is the School Administration's number that they are projecting for enrollment next year. He thanked the BOS for allowing them to roll over money into capital projects from last year, adding those will be greatly needed projects. He also thanked the BOS and Broadband Authority for all the work and money that has been put into the Firefly internet program that is going on in the county, adding that he thinks we may be the first county in the state to have wall to wall internet availability once this is done, which is an amazing feat.

Mr. Cheape then asked what the BOS thinks the population of the county will look like going forward. He noted that the School Board is of course interested in the number of school aged children as well as total population, adding that housing and affordable housing do go into that.

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Mr. Cheape noted that since 2007, the enrollment in the school system has dropped drastically, and also, state funding to the school system has dropped drastically. He addressed Mr. Harvey's comments and acknowledged that the County's contribution to the school budget has gone from around \$10 million in 2007 to about \$15 million at this time. He noted that the SOQ required level for the County is \$7.5 million and pointed out that no one in the state of Virginia funds at the SOQ level, and everyone funds over that level. He referred to the idea of a capital improvement committee and noted that they could maybe work on a long-term plan to fund bigger items. He stressed that they are doing everything they can to be as fiscally conservative as possible with the School System, and he thanked the BOS for everything they have done and continue to do for the kids in this county.

Mr. Harvey asked if the school funding is based on pupils. Mr. Cheape stated not solely. Ms. Irving stated the composite index is adjusted by the State every two years, and one of the components of that is the economy. She noted that as northern Virginia does well, it is an adverse relationship to our composite index.

Ms. Powell: Ms. Powell noted that the schools netted a loss of over twenty teaching positions since 2014, and they are working hard to try and cut costs, but at the end of the day, they can't control the composite index. Mr. Harvey asked what our taxpayers can afford. Ms. Powell stated that is a part of the strategic planning and asking how they can draw more kids in as a school system.

Mr. Parr: Mr. Parr noted that they also have to keep in mind that while an increase in family growth helps student enrollment, it also puts a pressure on the infrastructure of everything else we have. He urged the need to balance that growth with getting some other tax base, whether it's small business or industry or something else.

Mr. Barton: Mr. Barton stated that the primary thing that draws parents with children is the quality of education. He added that the boards want to make education both more affordable and better, and it really comes down to the teacher who provides the service to the student.

Mr. Perkins: Mr. Perkins noted that we are comparing ourselves to Amherst and Albemarle and all of the funding that they get or don't get. He stated that they have industry, business, and subdivisions and are doing all these things to help their infrastructure and tax base. He noted that he grew up here and travels to work, and his son is the only one in his household that works in the county. He added that Nelson has been referred to as a bedroom community, and the industry that we did have is now gone. He advised that the School Board would not have to come to the County for more money if we had a bigger tax base. Regarding the CIP list, he noted that some of the items are needs and some are safety issues, adding that they are trying to create a safe environment for the schools. He added they are trying to be competitive with their salaries as well.

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Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Rutherford acknowledged that Nelson County has a stagnant population, and we have an aging demographic and are a retiree community. He noted that we have no major subdivisions coming or affordable areas, and those are what allow a working class person to live in a community like ours. He added that it is critical to keep people from leaving, urging that both the BOS and School Board have to start getting aggressive. He stated that affordable housing is a crisis, and lack of internet availability was previously a crisis, and they treated it like one and got it done. Mr. Rutherford added that he would like to see Schuyler as a thriving neighborhood community like it used to be, but right now, it is a struggling community with an impoverished average median income. He noted that we have to look at infrastructure as Mr. Parr had mentioned. He asked how we can attract industry, noting that his answer for that is career and technical education. He advised that the Commonwealth has failed us, and we need to echo that to our State representatives.

Ms. Clair: Ms. Clair agreed with Mr. Rutherford and stated that we need to consistently talk to Richmond. She noted that there is a service economy thriving on 151 but the people who work there can't afford to live over there, so they live in other regions and drive in.

Mr. Cheape: Mr. Cheape referred to Mr. Perkins' comments and reiterated that we have to be competitive within our region to get new teachers. He advised that last year, we had the 26th strongest composite index in the state of Virginia, and the School Board uses the composite index as a barometer. He noted that we do have to compete with others in the region for teachers, and the two biggest players are the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County. In FY20-21, he advised that Nelson ranked 8th in the state for starting salary, which he noted helps attracts new teachers. He went on to say that particular salary remains the same for the first ten years, and our rankings in the state gradually go down because of that. He stated that one of their goals has been to try to get all of the pay scales around the 25th, however, salaries account for over 81% of their total budget.

Mr. Cheape then referred to the comprehensive plan and noted that we have an excellent tourism-based economy, however unfortunately, we do not have anywhere for anybody to stay, and there is nowhere else for the people to spend their money. He agreed with Mr. Rutherford and urged that we need to have skilled workers for whatever industry we may want to try and bring in. He then advised that the School Board wants the best education that they can provide for the money available.

Mr. Barton: Mr. Barton noted that he agrees with all of the previous comments and advised that the quality of education can be improved without spending more money. He stated that the key to this is the teachers, adding that the unintended consequences of mandated testing has really hurt teachers. He advised that the Covid pandemic has hurt them as well. Mr. Barton urged that he wants to make sure everyone appreciates how important teachers are to whatever subject is being talked about.

Ms. Turner-Giles: Ms. Turner-Giles expressed appreciation for Mr. Barton's comments and acknowledged that we have amazing teachers and staff, adding that it takes a village to run a school. She

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noted that it is time to create a new strategic plan together as two boards because recognizing what one needs affects the other needs. She advised that the school administration has gotten creative in how they work with the small amount of staffing they have, and their job is to create an environment that allows both students and teachers to succeed. Regarding capital improvements, she noted that CTE is more critical now than ever because those skills will be needed out of this pandemic to move things forward. She reiterated that she looks forward to an opportunity to either dust off or create a brand new strategic plan together.

Ms. Powell: Ms. Powell echoed Ms. Turner-Giles' comments. Regarding capital improvements monies, she noted that they are charged with the decision of whether they reinvest in the direct student hands-on educational programs like welding or take care of safety concerns such as school buses. She advised that they want to get to those hands-on CTE capital improvement-type investments, but their challenge from a safety standpoint is that they can never catch up enough to get to that point.

Mr. Harvey: Mr. Harvey referred to the quality of life in Nelson County and noted that a lot of people come here for that. He stated that increasing the amount of school aged children will not necessarily be good for the county and will actually cost money, especially in our situation where our composite index is so high. He advised it is a two-sided sword, and growth does not pay for itself. He then stressed that the quality of life is hurting in the Rockfish Valley, and they do not need any more development there. He reiterated that he does not think growth is the answer.

Mr. Cheape: Mr. Cheape advised that the School Board is not necessarily pro or anti- growth, however, they have to take their cues from the BOS. He noted that they would like to have the conversation to find out where we are heading and if we will continue trending this way for the next five or ten years.

Mr. Harvey: Mr. Harvey stated that trends are showing that young couples are not having kids anymore, so getting more young couples in the county will likely not solve the problem.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Rutherford reiterated his suggestion of creating a capital improvement joint board. Regarding the strategic/comprehensive plan, he advised that this costs the local government \$100,000, and it could take one or two years to do effectively. He added that this plan does need to happen, and he hopes they can address this in the future. He also reiterated his suggestion for having two by two meetings.

Mr. Harvey: Mr. Harvey advised that the only way the comprehensive plan works is when it is followed up by zoning. He added that he has never seen a comprehensive plan pulled off the shelf since he has been on the Board. He noted that they are required by the state to update it every six years, and it is very expensive.

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Ms. Clair: Ms. Clair suggested they move ahead with the CIP team. She also noted that they could take turns doing the two by two meetings.

Mr. Parr: Mr. Parr stressed that it is important to have rotation on the two by twos. He noted that he likes the idea of the Board Chairs each appointing two members for the CIP committee.

Mr. Reed asked about the timing of the committee and meetings. Mr. Cheape advised that sooner is better than later.

Mr. Parr: Mr. Parr noted that they need to address the \$800,000 shortfall and 1,507 enrollment number. He added that the enrollment number is something that needs to be addressed long-term as far as how we can bring in students. He advised that the short-term responsibility is addressing that \$800,000.

Mr. Perkins: Mr. Perkins noted that the School Board understands that the County funds more than just the schools, such as law enforcement and the Service Authority. He added that they are not asking the County to only fund the schools, but rather to fund the community so that we can all grow together.

Mr. Harvey: Mr. Harvey referred to leftover funds and noted that the Board may have to change their policy on this. He stated that this year, it wasn't because we saved the funds, but rather because they weren't spent, and it was probably twice than what the number normally is. He added that this was distorted by the fact that kids weren't in school and no buses were running due to the pandemic. He then stated that the School Board can turn in a budget with no increase, and it has been done in the past.

IV. NEXT STEPS

Mr. Reed advised that he and Mr. Cheape will poll the board members and each appoint two people for the CIP committee. He noted that the other members of the boards can have the two by two meetings. Mr. Cheape noted that he would like to mix up the two by twos so that relationships can develop. Mr. Reed suggested that they switch out after two or three months.

Mr. Cheape advised that each board is having their regular meeting next week, and he suggested selecting committee members before then. Mr. Reed noted that the initial two by two meeting can be the members not on the CIP committee.

Ms. Powell asked if there should be a commitment of how often the boards should meet. Mr. Parr suggested twice a year at minimum.

Mr. Cheape suggested that going forward, they should nail down some specific items that the two boards want to address together.

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Mr. Perkins suggested that the two boards meet three times per year: possibly July, September, and January. Mr. Reed advised that he will get together with Mr. Cheape to discuss this.

Mr. Harvey stated that until the School Board can get their budget under control, he thinks that there is no point in going forward talking about this if the County doesn't have the funds. Mr. Cheape noted that they will be discussing this going forward. Mr. Harvey questioned what things will look like when the kids go back to school.

Mr. Reed acknowledged that there is a slew of questions ahead, and good communication and flexibility will be needed. He commended Ms. Irving and Mr. Carter for their work on the finances of the School Administration and County.

Mr. Barton noted that the experience of going to Nelson County schools has been wonderful for so many students. He added that there is a great joy to teaching here, and that will not be lost if we continue to see education as being really important for all our children.

Ms. Powell agreed that there are questions going forward about whether the kids will come back to school or not. She advised that whenever they can return to school, a lot of kids will come back with a lot of compounded emotional issues and social issues, and there will be some academic catch-ups. She stated that they will have to take into account a lot of work that those students will need from a social and emotional standpoint to get them back to where they need to be and in a safe place. She advised that this is one given thing they have in their budget for this coming year.

Mr. Harvey stated that the failure is not with the school system or teachers but rather with the parents of those students. He urged that the parents need to be responsible and take interest in their kids' education. Ms. Powell noted that the school administration does not have any control over that, but they are helping to support those kids.

Ms. Turner-Giles echoed Ms. Powell's statement and stated that they do not have control over that, but their job is to meet people where they're at and to get them where they want them to be.

Final comments:

Mr. Parr: Mr. Parr noted that this has been a great first step and thanked everyone for making this event very productive. He volunteered to be on the capital committee.

Ms. Powell: Ms. Powell noted appreciation for everyone taking the time for this meeting and also the respect that both sides showed one another.

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Mr. Harvey: Mr. Harvey noted that the boards have to be able to work together, and the BOS has been very partial to the school system over the last 20 or 30 years and they will continue to do what they can.

Ms. Turner-Giles: Ms. Turner-Giles noted that she is excited that this meeting has actually taken place and is more excited to get more dates on the calendar for future meetings.

Mr. Barton: Mr. Barton noted that children are what we live for, and they can be inspired if they feel safe and loved.

Ms. Clair: Ms. Clair thanked the board chairs for putting this meeting together. She noted that she knows the BOS has always supported the school system, and she appreciates that.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Rutherford echoed the previous comments and looks forward to continued conversation about capital improvements and budgetary needs. He noted that he looks forward to a better future for Nelson County, adding that our children are a big piece of that. He stated that he would like to have more in-depth conversations about career and technical education, and he volunteered to be on the capital committee.

Mr. Perkins: Mr. Perkins noted appreciation for everybody coming out for this meeting and hopes that this is the first of at least a couple more meetings. He urged that we need to work on diversity in Nelson County, adding that the world is changing and we need to change with it.

Mr. Reed: Mr. Reed noted that this meeting surpassed his expectations on all levels and there were a lot of heartfelt conversations. He looks forward to working with Mr. Cheape on next steps.

Mr. Cheape: Mr. Cheape thanked Chairman Reed and the members of both boards. He noted that he loved how it was a free exchange of ideas, and he also loved the diversity of people around the room with their experience and backgrounds. He added that this will make for a tremendous working relationship. He advised Mr. Harvey that there are a lot of tough decisions to be made going forward if enrollment continues to drop, and they will do everything they can to work with the BOS to do the best they can with the costs.

V. ADJOURNMENT

At 5:50 PM, Mr. Rutherford moved to adjourn and Mr. Parr seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Supervisors voted unanimously by voice vote to approve the motion and the meeting adjourned.