

**MINUTES**  
**CHATHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**CHATHAM COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**JOINT MEETING**  
**FEBRUARY 28, 2005**

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The Board of Commissioners (“the Board”) of the County of Chatham, North Carolina, met with the Chatham County Board of Education in the Superior Courtroom, Courthouse Circle, located in Pittsboro, North Carolina, at 6:30 PM on February 28, 2005.

Present: Chairman Bunkey Morgan; Vice Chairman Tommy Emerson; Commissioners Mike Cross and Patrick Barnes; County Manager, Charlie Horne; Finance Officer Vicki McConnell; and Clerk to the Board, Sandra B. Sublett

Absent: Commissioner Carl Outz

**Board of Education**

Present: Chairman Allan Zimmerman; Vice Chairman Ronnie Collins; School Board Members Deb McManus, Norman Clark, and Holly Duncan

Chairman Morgan called the meeting to order at 6:45 PM and welcomed everyone in attendance.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND INVOCATION**

Chairman Morgan invited everyone present to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance after which Alan Zimmerman delivered the invocation.

Chairman Morgan reviewed the agenda and explained the reason for the meeting.

Alan Zimmerman introduced Board of Education members and thanked the Board of Commissioners for the opportunity to meet and discuss school needs.

**BOARD OF EDUCATION PRESENTATION**

Deb McManus gave a power point presentation on the 2005 projected needs of the school including growth predictions by school, current growth worth noting, new schools requested (a new K-5 school at Siler City, and a new middle and high school in northeast Chatham County), new construction and renovations, cost of new schools and other new construction, and cost of renovations.

Ms. McManus stated that the Integrated Planning for Schools and Community (IPSAC) Study predicts percentage growth by 2009-2010 for each high school feeder district at Northwood – 48.9%; Jordan-Matthews – 33.6%; Chatham Central – 17.7%; that three auxiliary gymnasiums, a new cafeteria at Jordan-Matthews, and a multi-purpose room at Moncure are needed; that renovations most needed at this

time include: Renovation of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade buildings at Horton Middle School, renovation/expansion of existing gymnasium at Bennett, renovation/expansion of existing gymnasium at Silk Hope, renovation of existing gym at Horton Middle School, addition of softball field lights at Chatham Central, Jordan-Matthews and Northwood, and addition of tennis court lights at Chatham Central and Jordan-Matthews. She gave current and escalated costs of building the three new schools, stating that the current cost of the projects total \$89,749,011 with a projected three-year escalated cost of \$103,734,000, and reviewed new construction and renovation costs. A copy of the presentation is attached hereto and by reference made a part hereof.

## **DISCUSSION OF BOARD OF EDUCATION'S REQUEST AND FUNDING**

Commissioner Emerson asked how the Board of Education arrived at their escalated cost estimates.

Commissioner Barnes explained how prices had increased over the past fourteen months in his general contracting business. He stated that if building construction was delayed for another three years, the Board would realize astronomical escalation.

Chairman Morgan stated that he would like to see the Board accomplish a little along rather than waiting until so much needs to be done at one time; that these types of things need to be addressed with future capital planning; that he doesn't feel that anyone is questioning the needs, but that they are questioning the price and when to do it.

Commissioner Barnes asked how long the schools would be adequate if they were built right away.

Mr. Zimmerman explained that with the projected summary, the schools would remain adequate until the fiscal years 2009-2010. He stated that the last school bond was in 1995 for five million dollars; and that this was a supplement to a fifteen million dollar bond the previous year.

Chairman Morgan stated that as the County grows, so do the needs; that there are several ways in which to pay for the schools including bonds, COPS, combination of bonds and COPS, and independent bank installments; and that part of it is the timing. He asked if there was a prioritization of the three schools.

The Board was told that Siler City Elementary School would be needed first, and that the other two were in a close race for second; that all were desperately needed; and that if the schools were not built, money would have to be spent on additional mobile units.

Commissioners Cross and Barnes asked about building prototype schools.

The architect stated that he would address this issue in his presentation.

## **BREAK**

The Chairman called for a five-minute break.

## **ARCHITECT PRESENTATION**

Robby Ferris, SFLA Architects, gave an overview of current and escalated building costs. He explained that they had built eight to nine prototype schools in the past, but that they were not building as many now due to inconsistent prices and the colossal fluctuation in the price of materials; that they have seen a big increase in one year; that they hope that prices are stabilizing now; that trying to reduce costs with

cheaper materials/methods will not make facilities better or even equal; that North Carolina has been blessed with relatively stable prices and low inflation for a number of years; and that recent escalation was probably overdue even though it caught everyone by surprise. He encouraged everyone to build quality facilities stating that it will be worth it in the long run.

A copy of the architect's presentation is attached hereto and by reference made a part hereof.

### **PUBLIC INPUT SESSION**

**Greg Soloman**, 406 Buck Branch Road, Pittsboro, NC, stated that there are a lot of things that the two Boards do jointly; that he recommends one person be hired that can do things for both Boards regarding finding land; that he is concerned that they are only looking at one architect; that it doesn't make sense that a prototype is not any cheaper; that he has concerns about the high school site; that his main concern is that the road is one of the most dangerous in the County and the State; that it abuts the Corps of Engineers land; that the school needs to be out on Highway #64 near Big Woods; that the high school is a greater priority than the middle school; that he was happy to see renovations and improvements to existing schools; that the most important thing is that the County does it right this time; that he encourages the Board to include supplies and unfunded positions; that he would like to see the new schools funding done under COPS so that the remainder of the needs could be done under bonds; that this will meet some of the recreational needs; that the Board of Commissioners should encourage Briar Chapel developers to do the site work; and that money should be collected up front to help with start up costs. Additionally, he encouraged the Board to not go to zero revenue because of the supplies to go into the new schools; that when the Board is making the budget, they should think about supplies, teacher positions, etc.

**John Graybeal**, 3396 Alston Chapel Road, Pittsboro, NC, stated that he is present to cheerlead for Northwood High School; that he hopes that anything that comes out of all of the discussions does not do anything to adversely affect the sociology, the character, and the present strength of that school; that the school has strong academics, great band, dance, drama, vocational, sports, and arts programs; that there is a dynamic racial-ethnic-economic mix of students; and that he is concerned about compromising that diversity.

**Jeffrey Starkweather**, 590 Old Goldston Road, Pittsboro, NC, stated that the public schools are our biggest form of investment for economic development; that this should be introduced as a referendum; that people have the right to vote on something this big; that it is a great educational opportunity for the public; that he is concerned about splitting up the needs by funding (COPS) type for fear that some may be left behind; that we have not realistically looked at what we are facing down the road, especially in the northern part of the County; that we need to be honest about what is coming next; that it is important that the development proposals include the inflated construction costs; that the facilities need to be open to the public to help generate support for school needs; that it is important that schools not be put in a situation that encourages sprawl; that the best size of a high school is about 600, not 1,200 in terms of quality education received; that there are three ways of paying for it: property tax increases; impact fees; and legislative action for a real estate transfer tax; that a referendum passing the real estate transfer tax should be included in the legislation and community intervention should be encouraged; and that this would be another opportunity to go out and educate the people as to what the County is up against.

### **CONTINUING BOARD'S DISCUSSION**

Chairman Morgan asked about sharing school facilities for recreational purposes with the County.

Norman Clark explained that the school system and the County Recreation Department entered contract agreements for use of property for certain events. He stated that they are now sharing gym space;

that they use the softball fields; that East Chatham baseball has some agreements for some spaces; that when the auxiliary gyms were placed on the "needs list", they were planning to become more involved with the Recreation Department; and that these things were planned with the thoughts that they would be part of the Recreation Department.

Chairman Morgan questioned if part of the County's recreation fees could be used if there was sufficient co-mingling.

Mr. Zimmerman stated that they visited a school in Fayetteville during the past year; that they had a gym built onto the school; that it was also used for community recreation when possible; that they had doors locked that kept people from the outside from entering the building during school hours; that it was technically a free-standing gym but was attached to the building; and that he feels there will have to be someone from the school in attendance during outside activities to ensure that the building will be taken care of.

Commissioner Cross stated that there were three or four volunteers in the Moncure area who are responsible for opening and closing the Moncure School Gym when it is used by citizens; that it has not required school personnel to be in attendance; and that they have had no problems.

Ms. McManus stated that the architect prices do not include books and computers but do include furnishings.

Commissioner Emerson stated that the school budget was the largest part of the County's budget; and that with growth he thinks that all accept the fact that there are going to be increased operating costs. He asked if there was any correlation between the projected increase in operating expense on the new buildings.

Mr. Ferris stated that they had prepared projects costs based on historical data; that operating costs would not increase at the same rate as construction price index; that it would be based more on consumer price index; that the biggest single operating costs incurred (with the exception of teachers) is energy; that energy costs can go up dramatically; that he feels that within the next fifteen years, energy costs will probably double; and that because of this, they focus very heavily on energy costs.

Commissioner Barnes stated that school design within the past few years has changed tremendously; that quite a few of the schools now use metal roofs; that insulation has changed; that lighting electronics have improved; that everything is leaning toward less maintenance; and that it cost less to maintain something now than it did thirty years ago.

Holly Duncan stated that a lot of the work began before she was elected to office; that the information presented is current and valid; and that she feels that they have presented their needs, not wants.

Commissioner Emerson stated that he appreciated the Board of Education's hard work; that it is obvious that they have diligently done their homework; that he appreciates their honesty; and he knows whatever is done, that they need to be united; that it needs to be a joint decision; that when they go to the taxpayer, they need to be upfront in telling them what is being proposed, the associated costs, and how it is going to be paid; that he feels as long as both boards can continue with good communication, work on it jointly, and use their best efforts, they will emerge successful in the long run.

Norman Clark thanked the Board of Commissioners for having the joint meeting. He stated that they look forward to working with the Board and he feels that this is the beginning of the joint efforts to improve the status of Chatham County.

Deb McManus stated that she feels that her board is unanimous in their support that this is what they need at this time; and that she appreciates the Board of Commissioners' efforts in inviting them to the meeting.

Commissioner Cross stated that he appreciated everyone coming together and hopes that it can continue on a regular basis. He stated that he was surprised that there was not more public participation.

Ronald Collins thanked everyone for being involved. He stated that he was probably the reason that the bond did not come up earlier as he was determined to have a study done on it. He stated that he feels as though the study has united the County and the bond will be successful.

Alan Zimmerman stated that these were only their needs; that their wants had to be done away with; that their initial bond was \$131 million; that they worked on it to cut it down; and that cost, quality, and size were the determining factors. He stated that he appreciated the Board of Commissioners' efforts in having the joint meeting and listening to their concerns.

Chairman Morgan thanked citizens and Board members for working on this project; that the Board of Commissioners has to figure out a way to pay for it; that he would like to see the Board of Commissioners start talking about the funding and timing; that he knows that the longer the building is put off the more it is going to cost; and that both boards will continue to meet to talk about the issues at hand.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 8:45 PM.

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Bunkey Morgan, Chairman

ATTEST:

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Sandra B. Sublett, CMC, Clerk to the Board  
Chatham County Board of Commissioners