

Wicomico County Council
Open Work Session Part 2
January 20, 2015

Work sessions require written minutes that reflect each item that the public body considered, the action that the public body took on each item and each vote that was recorded. **It should be noted that at work sessions, the Wicomico County Council does not take formal action, nor is a vote taken on any item discussed.**

In attendance: John T. Cannon, President; Matt Holloway, Vice President; Ernest F. Davis, Marc Kilmer, Larry W. Dodd, John B. Hall and Joe Holloway.

Present: Matthew E. Creamer, Council Administrator; Edgar A. Baker, Jr., County Attorney; Maureen Howarth, Deputy County Attorney and Melissa Holland, Recording Secretary.

Board of Education :

Dr. John Fredericksen, Superintendent of Schools, came before the Council.

Facilities Task Force Report :

Dr. Fredericksen said there are three strategic priorities and they are high school achievement, safe learning environment and effective and efficient operations. He said that the School Facilities Task Force studied all of the issues surrounding the facilities and COMAR and did this for approximately a year. He said they had 9 meetings. He said there are some aging facilities and things are changing. He said that there are now middle school and Pre-K which was not the case in the past. He said they looked at the cost of construction and technology as well. He said they reviewed the Facilities Master Plan. He said there were 32 people that served on the committee and were from the community, construction and schools. He said that the Task Force looked to align class sizes to state capacity standards. He said there are a lot of children on special permission and the interest is to make sure the children that are residents in the school district have a place in the school and are not crowded out. He said they looked at alternative financing and reducing overall school building portfolio. He said a Principal is needed as is a Vice Principal, Head Cook, Media Specialist and Nurse and this is necessary regardless of the number of children in a school. Mr. Joe Holloway said he has spoken to a parent who does not want her child in a 600 student school. Dr. Fredericksen said a study was done and there is no difference in a 300 student school or a 600 student school. He said the kids get the same quality. He said that Delmar gets the highest test scores and they have 900 students. He said that a typical principal can't remember more than 400 names and may forget some student's names. Mr. Kilmer said he spoke to a parent and they wanted to know if transportation costs would be reduced by consolidating schools together. Dr. Fredericksen said initially there is a higher cost to run transportation however he said it is a small cost \$30,000 as opposed to \$600,000. He said they are looking at making more of the schools Pre-K through 5th grade which is a savings to the Board of Education as well. He said there is a better link with the community as well if there is more time a child is spent at a school then having them there for only a few years and the parents tend to participate more. Mr. Cannon said the concerns in Pittsville were that there were more transportation issues such as

sending the children from Salisbury Middle to Pittsville. Dr. Fredericksen said he doesn't feel that transportation was a big issue however he feels there are other issues such as sewer and water. He said he has no interest in expanding Pittsville Elementary. Dr. Fredericksen said the attendance boundary is being moved two miles and the line is Phillip Morris Drive. He said the line did not move very far to reach 134 more students. Mr. Cannon said he thought that the parents were upset because children were being moved from all over the county to make up the numbers at Pittsville. Dr. Fredericksen said he wants the children to have the shortest commute as possible. Mr. Willey said he attended the Pittsville Elementary meeting and said there is a school underutilized and has been recently renovated and he doesn't know how the Board can justify empty seats when the school can change the boundary lines and fill those seats. He said that parents were concerned about portables at Willards and said he does not believe there is support to do anything at Willards until bricks and mortar can be done. Mr. Willey said they don't want to have portables at Willards at this time. Dr. Fredericksen said he would rather have only a few buildings that are well maintained than a lot of buildings that are not maintained. He said they are establishing an attendance area task force to regularly examine school enrolments and boundaries. Mr. Hall asked how often this is done to which Dr. Fredericksen said he looks at the numbers every year and said a thorough review was done 5 years ago and a decision was made. He said the last major change was in 1998.

Dr. Fredericksen presented the Council with the recommended next steps. He said the first step is to un-pair Willards and Pittsville. Mr. Joe Holloway asked how many children have been moved to Pittsville to which Dr. Fredericksen said 134 children will be moved. Mr. Joe Holloway asked from which location the children will be moved to Pittsville to which Dr. Fredericksen said the children on the East side of Phillip Morris Drive. He said the second step is to finish the new Bennett Middle and James M. Bennett site work. He said the project has been under budget. He said another step is to convert Wicomico Middle to a swing space and would go to other schools in the system. He said there are 134 students from Wicomico Middle that will go to Pittsville. He said by using Wicomico Middle as a swing school it will save \$700,000 in operating costs. He also said when they remodeled Pittsville Elementary the workers worked 7 days a week at 12 hour days. He said if a school is used as a swing school it saves from overtime. He said they plan to build a new West Salisbury Elementary. He said they would convert Chipman School into an Early Learning Center. He said they would like to do a limited renovation of Delmar Elementary and if the state Capital Improvement Budget includes money for this some of this may be completed this year. He said another step is to build a new Beaver Run Elementary however that is five to ten years in the future. He said another step is to build a new Glen Avenue and re-purpose East Salisbury. He said the committee has not decided if they should build a new Glen Avenue or remodel the school. Mr. Willey said if West Salisbury Elementary is built to accommodate 650 students that would be a workable size. He said if West Salisbury could accommodate 650, then Chipman could be an easy transition to make it an Early Learning Center and they would not have to lease the building at the Infants/Toddlers Program. He said the program now is spread out and would be in one place.

Mr. Joe Holloway asked what effect moving the students to Pittsville Middle School would have on Willards Elementary. Dr. Cathy Townsend said it will have no effect on Willards Elementary because the lines for the elementary school are not changing only the lines for the middle school are changing. Mr. Joe Holloway asked if they will not allow special permissions. Dr. Fredericksen said they would like to reduce the number of special permissions but they won't be able to get rid of all special permissions. He does feel that the neighborhood residents should have first choice. Mr. Willey said the special permissions should only be approved if there is room in that grade and it is not over crowded. Mr. Cannon asked how Pre-K is effecting enrollment and how is the process being implemented. Dr. Handy said there are 400 Pre-K students currently with some of them being part time. She said the state would like all Pre-K programs to be all day programs. She said there are several full day programs at the Wicomico Early Learning Center, West Salisbury and Chipman Elementary. She said the issue is space and more capacity will be needed in the schools. Dr. Fredericksen said Pre-K is a growth area for educational services and it is very affective toward getting students ready for Kindergarten. He said the Board of Education is only getting \$400,000 on a program that costs \$1.5 million. He said they are speaking with the legislators to provide funding. He said they are delighted to serve the kids but there is a facility challenge and operational challenge. Dr. Handy said the only way they are able to have a Pre-K program is due to grants from the state. Mr. Cannon said he feels that the state is making the Board of Education take care of the children. Mr. Willey said the evidence is that Pre-K makes a difference for children to perform at an expected level and it is effective. Mr. Cannon said he read that the only true advantage of Pre-K was with social skills and not a strong influence on their educational abilities. Dr. Fredericksen said the majority of the programs are for handicapped or low income children. Mr. Kilmer asked if there is a mandate for Pre-K. Dr. Fredericksen said they are mandated to provide services however, the level of service varies. Mr. Matt Holloway asked what the annual shortfall is, to which Dr. Fredericksen said it varies from year to year however, it has never paid for itself. Dr. Fredericksen said if the state would count and pay for each one as full time enrollment then funding would be available. Mr. Cannon said that he read in the report there was a talk about alternative funding and establishing a committee for alternative funding. Dr. Fredericksen said the Board is open to anything that brings money. He said they met with the County Executive and a team before and said the current funding system, which is in place, is the cheapest way to borrow money. He said when they talked about alternative financing, such as a loan to do a project, he said it appears as a closed in lease and the investors want a financial return so instead of a low interest rate it will be high.

He said another step is limited renovations of non-CTE Parkside High School; major renovations and additions to Mardela Middle and High School; new Fruitland East, un-pair with Fruitland West; replace Wicomico High School; Pinehurst Elementary; new or additions to Westside Intermediate/Closed Westside Primary School and new or additions to Northwestern elementary. All of these projects are years out. He said if any group would like a discussion on this report he would be more than happy to meet with them.

Mr. Cannon said he was impressed during the tour of West Salisbury and said that everyone was well prepared and Mr. Hugh Livingston was very knowledgeable about the building. He said that the Council needs to engage with the Board of Education and said the Council needs to visit all of the schools. He said if a renovation is done and there is lead then abatement is needed and the cost is very expensive. Dr. Fredericksen passed out a timeline to the Council. Mr. Cannon said he would like to see the neighborhood schools stay where they are instead of having fragmentation.

Dr. Fredericksen said the Board of Education is meeting with the Board of Public Works next week. He said that most of the requests have been deferred. Mr. Cannon said he does not think that everyone was anxious to delay West Salisbury and said there is a concern about the capital funding that will come from Annapolis. He said that the state recognizes there could be capital issues as they have a budget deficit. Dr. Fredericksen said they would like to do a low cost planning year and they don't want to get out of the queue. Mr. Cannon said the disparity grant has already been reduced by the state in the amount of \$1.6 million. Mr. Cannon said they would still have to commit to architectural and engineering costs even with the planning process.

Mr. Hall asked how the solar project is coming along. Dr. Fredericksen said he has not had any meetings on this, as Mr. Foret and Mr. Ford are leading the project and the project is on schedule and moving forward. He said there is a lot of technical work to be done. Mr. Hall said the cell towers have generated a lot of revenue and could they put up more. Dr. Fredericksen said they would love to have more cell towers as the Board of Education makes money, the Board of Education can put something on the tower and they use for microwave backup between schools and the staff has better cell service. Dr. Townsend said there is another request on the table for a cell tower which will go before the Board of Education.

Open Work Session Adjourned.