

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA)
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COUNTY OF STOKES)
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OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONERS
STOKES COUNTY GOVERNMENT
DANBURY, NORTH CAROLINA
THURSDAY NOVEMBER 2, 2023

The Stokes County Board of County Commissioners, State of North Carolina, met for a Joint Meeting with the Stokes County Board of Education on Thursday, November 2, 2023 at 6:30 pm in the Commissioners' Chambers located in the Administrative Building in Danbury, North Carolina.

The following members for the Board of County Commissioners were present for the Joint Meeting: Chairman Rick Morris, Vice Chairman Brad Chandler, Commissioner Sonya Cox, Commissioner Ronnie Mendenhall, and Commissioner Keith Wood.

The following Board of Education (BOE) members were present for the Joint Meeting: Chairperson Von Robertson, Vice Chairperson Dwayne Bryant, Member Justin Duncan, Member Cheryl Knight, and Member Mike Rogers.

The following school administrative staff members were present for the Joint Meeting: Dr. Brad Rice, Superintendent, Dr. Jared Jones, Assistant Superintendent, Executive Director of Finance Lanette Moore, Director of Maintenance/Facilities Richie Roberts, and Administrative Assistant to the Board of Education Pam Bolejack.

The following County Administration staff members were present for the Joint Meeting: Interim County Manager/Clerk to the Board Amber Brown and Finance Director Lisa Lankford.

Chairman Chandler called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance.

BOE Chairman Robertson called the joint meeting for the Board of Education to order.

INVOCATION

Chairman Morris invited those in attendance to join the Boards in the invocation, if so desired.

BOE Member Duncan delivered the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Morris invited those in attendance to join the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Morris noted that before the meeting opened, a poll was taken from those in audience to see if anyone would like to make any public comments with no one interested at that time.

After Chairman Morris' comments regarding public comments, one person from the audience requested to speak.

Chairman Morris entertained a motion to approve and amend tonight's agenda to allow public comments.

Commissioner Cox moved to approve tonight's agenda with the addition of public comments. Commissioner Wood seconded the motion.

Chairman Morris opened the floor for discussion/questions/comments.

With no discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

BOE Chairperson Robertson entertained a motion to amend the agenda presented by the Board of County Commissioners to add public comments.

BOE Member Knight moved to amend the agenda. BOE Member Rogers seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

BOE Chairperson Robertson entertained a motion to approve the amended agenda.

BOE Member Knight moved to approve the amended agenda. BOE Member Duncan seconded the motion.

BOE Chairperson Robertson opened the floor for discussion/questions/comments.

With no discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chairman Morris opened the floor for public comments.

The following spoke during public comments.

Cameron Rogatsios

Resident of Stokes County

Ms. Rogatsios noted the following:

- Lives in Stokes County

- Sure, there is stuff that I don't understand, but what it seems to me like if we have got an opportunity to give \$2 million to get \$38 million, why would we not do that no matter which school it goes towards
- That is \$38 million that we don't have to spend later down the road
- It just makes zero sense to me, but I am sure there may be some stuff I don't understand
- That is just my two cents

Chairman Morris questioned if there was anyone else who wanted to speak since the agenda was amended to add public comments.

With no other speakers, Chairman Morris closed the floor for public comments.

JOINT MEETING DISCUSSION

Chairman Morris turned the floor over to BOE Chairperson Robertson for opening comments from the Board of Education members.

BOE Chairperson Robertson commented:

- Would like to first thank the Board of County Commissioners for the invite to discuss the long-range planning – something that the Board of Education has been discussing for several months
- Have spent a lot of time during our meetings discussing this topic
- We feel like we have pretty much come to a consensus on our Board of Education, and we will be happy tonight to discuss a little bit of our plan and then answer any questions that the commissioners may have

BOE Member Knight commented:

- Would like to thank the Board of Commissioners for participating with us
- What might seem like a cut and dry issue has turned out to be very, very complex with lots of ripple effects from changes within the school system
- I think the Board would agree, it has been difficult, trying, stressful – probably one of the toughest things I know that I have had to take on as far as consolidation
- Consolidation is almost like a bad word – it is tough
- I know this is a historically situation that kind of has been seen over the past twenty-five years or more – now we are trying to address it the best we can
- We still have a lot of work to do that is why we are here to talk to the Board of Commissioners

BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant commented:

- Would also like to thank the Board of Commissioners for meeting with us – know we have been working on scheduling this joint meeting, glad we are here tonight
- I know how trying this is for everyone and it has not been easy, but we have 5,500 kids that we have got to think about, I am trying to do what is best for all of them
- We just hope we can all reach a consensus that helps them all

BOE Member Duncan commented:

- Thank you for letting us come to present tonight
- My desire is that we can work together as two Boards
- This is a county problem that we have inherited
- Let us work together to come to an agreement and continue to what we have always done and that is - live in the best county in the nation, in my opinion
- Again, thank you for taking the time
- I hope we can actually get some things done tonight and look toward the future for a vision

BOE Member Rogers commented:

- I will keep my comments short and sweet because the other members have already said it
- Thank you for hosting us
- It is good that we can all come together
- We did not get into this problem overnight
- We are not going to get out of this problem overnight
- We are trying to fix the short-term issues while still having a long-term vision
- What that vision is going to be, I don't know because this County looks 180 degrees different than it did when Commissioner Cox and I started serving on the Board of Education in 2010
- It changes quickly, we just have to adapt for it
- We are all in this together

Chairman Morris opened the floor over opening comments from the Board of County Commissioners.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- I will make my comments short here in the beginning with the hopes we will have a second time to speak
- Confirmed with Chairman Morris there will be at least a second time (or more) to speak
- Would like to start by welcoming all the Board of Education members here tonight – good to see everyone
- Hope everybody in attendance in the audience had a good ride to scenic Danbury with the leaves turning – appreciate you coming out on a night that you didn't have to, but made that extra effort to come here to listen about the schools, the Board of Education's proposal, and some of the county commissioners' ideas
- You did not have to come out, you could have stayed at home right now
- Just want to say welcome and when we work our way back around the second time, I will dig into a few questions

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Good evening, everybody, especially those attending tonight in person and to those streaming on YouTube
- Appreciate your participation
- Thanks to the school board for attending tonight's joint meeting – good to see you again
- Think we have a lot on our plate tonight and I will get into more later on in the meeting

- But just a few quick things, sometimes there seems to be a misimpression or a misinterpretation I think on a lot of different sides or different parts of the County
- I will just make it clear that I represent Stokes County, I live in the northern side of the County, but I represent all of Stokes County
- King is in Stokes County last time I checked, and I represent King
- For people to infer just because I live in the northern part of the County, they don't know me, they are wrong
- Just want to get that out there
- If I was a real politician, by someone doing that I might do something in spite -- go the other way other than looking at all the different facts
- We will be able to clear a lot of this stuff later on in the meeting

Commissioner Wood commented:

- Welcome everyone tonight especially the school board, it is nice to show that we are not at each other's throat and that we like each other
- It is not your problem we got; it is not my problem, but we have got to solve it
- This started a long time ago and now we know why nobody jumped on it
- It is not going to be easy, and everyone is not going to be happy
- But everyone better get along because that is what we do in Stokes County

Commissioner Cox commented:

- Thank you all for being here and thank you all for watching at home that couldn't be here
- Thank you for taking an interest in what is going on in our County with the schools
- Appreciate the Board of Education coming up here and doing this joint meeting so that maybe we can iron out a few misconceptions as Vice Chairman Chandler said that are out there -- there are lots of others not mentioned by Vice Chairman Chandler that we need to iron out
- I think what got us here in the first place, if I remember correctly, was the perception that our Board of Commissioners had some blame of, I will just talk about the "elephant in the room" why consolidation was going to have to happen
- I don't think that was the intent of the Board of Education or any board member in particular, I think people heard what they wanted to hear and don't always understand the funding and how it works with schools along with the Board of Education's role and the Board of Commissioners' role and how that all works
- That had some people talking about how we were to blame, and I am talking about community members not the Board of Education, but it just got all misconstrued and turned upside down
- We, I think, just wanted to sort of have an opportunity to clear the air about how we felt about consolidation, the funding, and how it all works
- Maybe simplify it so people could understand it a little better and what is our role
- I know that when I was on the Board of Education, maybe even before Mike came on, we did a master boardmanship class and really dug deep into the role of being a board member
- Some of that has stuck with me and even served me well as a member of the Board of County Commissioners because the roles are so different

- Sometimes, it is easy to cross the lanes and not stay in our own lane like we should
- The last thing that I would like to see is this Board of Commissioners try to micromanage the Board of Education to a degree that things are done as they have been done in the past and the decisions were made that were not always the best decisions for building schools, adding on to schools, and where to put schools that has kind of led us to where we are today
- Talking about things that were done in the past that we are trying to make up for now or try to kick the can down the road in the past when, you know, it was easier to appease people and try to do that then to do the right thing sometimes – that needs to stop
- We just need to do the right thing
- That is my two cents for now

Chairman Morris commented:

- Would like to welcome everybody
- For those watching online, we have a full room here tonight with most of the seats taken
- That is good, we welcome participation from the public and comments that we just heard that help us make decisions
- Welcome the Board of Education, it is good to meet with you to air out where we are at on all these issues associated with consolidation
- I think each one of us as elected officials probably one of the most important things that we are expected to do, is to be good stewards of the tax dollars that we are given to spend for the various services that are provided in the County
- So, when you have a charter to do that and that is your top priority then you are not going to always agree with people on things
- Might be a lot of times where we have to agree to disagree
- Like Commissioner Wood stated, we are all friends here and none of this is personal
- I think we all feel very strongly about how we do our job and how we handle taxpayer funding
- I look forward to getting into the discussion on the plan that you guys are working on and then we will share some thoughts from the commissioner side

Chairman Morris noted that the joint discussion, as agreed with BOE Chairperson Robertson, will start with Dr. Brad Rice giving us a short update of what the current plan is, then the commissioners will comment after that about where they stand and questions they may have - basically just have open discussion between the Boards to answer questions and so forth.

Chairman Morris turned the floor over to Dr. Brad Rice, Superintendent, for comments regarding the current plan.

Dr. Rice commented:

- Several of you all have already mentioned things that I was going to mention
- Will just get back into it with a little detail
- This has been a long process for the Board of Education that started in 2021 with an enrollment study that looked at past enrollment as well as future projections
- Then you commissioned the facility study that took place in the 2022-23 school year

- Don't believe anyone was shocked by the results of the study – we know we have older facilities
- Then we did two efficiency studies – the Masonboro Group and ORED-NC State
- Since then, the Board of Education has been discussing different options, potential options, held a public hearing, and going through that
- The three issues that our Board of Education has tried to address in this process:
 - Overall declining enrollment in our schools
 - The divided services that we have especially in our elementary schools due to small schools
 - The art, music, and physical education teachers that are divided out, there are not enough students in one school to just serve one school
 - Counselors are divided out
 - Nurses are divided out – it is great if you get sick on the day the nurse is there, but what about the four days a week the nurse is not there
 - Maintaining of nineteen (19) school facilities
 - As Commissioner Cox stated there is a special tax rate that goes into funding facilities which is something that statutorily happens
 - While the taxes have increased through the years, not really at the rate of inflation
 - So, trying to maintain nineteen (19) facilities with the tax dollars that come from sales tax, it is a losing battle
- As you know, the results of the facility studies started off showed:
 - Have six (6) schools that were at least partially built in the 1950s
 - Have some schools that I call “franken schools” that have components that were built one year and other components that were built in different years
 - You have new parts and old parts
 - At least part of the existing structures:
 - Had six in the 1950s which is the most of any decade
 - Had two built in the 1960s
 - Had three in the 1970s
 - Had four in the 1990s
 - Had one in 2000s
 - Had two built in 2010s
 - None after the 2010s
 - With that, the facility study came back that it would take between \$50 and \$90 million to renovate all those schools
- With that and all of those combined, our Board of Education decided to discuss closing three schools:
 - Pine Hall Elementary School
 - Pinnacle Elementary School
 - Lawsonville Elementary School
- That being a first step in this process
- While that discussion was going on, the discussion came up with using all of that information to apply for a grant to rebuild King Elementary School that would hold many of the students from Pinnacle Elementary School that had been discussed closing
- That was a concurrent conversation that went on with consolidation

- Not necessarily tied together, but certainly can be tied together
- As I spoke to you all last week, part of the grant criteria that moves or gives you a higher grant rating, if you will, is if consolidation is part of it
- So, if the Board does vote to close Pinnacle, that would strengthen that grant application
- If they vote not to close Pinnacle, we will still apply for the grant; we still believe we have a strong case for it, but consolidation would strengthen the application
- So those are concurrent conversations, concurrent decisions that do go together but also don't go together
- The next phase we would look at after the debt comes off in about seven years
- At the way that things go these days, we know that there may be commissioner turnover, there may be Board of Education turnover, there may be superintendent turnover, so our Board did not look to make hard plans in cement for seven years or eleven years down the road
- Again, as BOE Member Rogers said that the last ten years haven't been the same for Stokes County as they were the previous ten years
- While there are some thoughts about that — the thought was to take this as an initial step and then make an additional step later
- That is my opening comments

Chairman Morris opened the floor for commissioner comments starting with the two previous school board members.

Commissioner Cox commented:

- After seeing the grant application for rebuilding King Elementary, I think it is pretty obvious that you were doing everything that you could to maximize your chances of getting this grant
- There is no reason to apply for grant for a school that you don't think you can get it for
- Obviously, this does make the most sense to try to get the grant funding because \$38 million handed to you for \$2 million, have to agree with our public speaker, that is pretty substantial
- In my whole time on the Board of Education, I don't know that we ever got any money to build a new school
- Reiterated that is pretty substantial to be able to get a grant like that
- I do remember from the facility study King Elementary was recommended to be replaced first because of the security issues, the safety of students being on a spread-out campus, the flooding, and numerous other things
- I have asked some questions of BOE members and Dr. Rice in between their other meeting and this meeting today about the feasibility of putting this new school at Pinnacle versus at the King location
- I am not married to the idea that it has to be in King
- They brought up an interesting point that I had not thought about which is that water and sewer are not extended to Pinnacle
- That is a problem, when it comes to replacing school buildings or building schools, which is having city water and sewer — it makes a big difference

- I know that when I was still on the Board of Education, we talked about relocating it between King and Pinnacle which I think that has been already looked at – trying to find a more central location
- So that if you build a school and you combined schools then it is a new school for everybody – that kind of gives everybody on the same playing field coming in
- I like that idea, but I also know that twenty acres between King and Pinnacle is going to cost you a lot of money
- I haven't seen any land, used to look for options when it was discussed when I was on the Board of Education
- Couldn't find land then and sure there probably is not any land available now
- I would have liked that idea if it was feasible, but I don't think that is
- I know that you all have done your due diligence with trying to find the best location
- I know that some things have been mentioned about congestion and the traffic in the King area and what a new school there would mean
- I feel the City of King has to look into that – their issue that they need to figure out a way to resolve if it is a problem
- It is twice a day for about 45 minutes a day – it is not like it is an all-day issue
- I know that King Police Department has been really good to help you all with traffic situations
- Personally, I am in favor of applying for the grant to replace King Elementary
- I can't think of any reason not to try to get it
- We may get it, we may not get it
- It is safe to say that if we don't get the grant, we won't be building the school
- I do think that we have to plan and strategically plan as two Boards and what we are going to do if we don't get the grant
- We still need to build a couple of elementary schools and consolidate some schools just because these buildings are so old but at the same time how do you do that without interrupting the lives of 400 kids versus 100 kids
- I know you have thought of that – that is your job, not our job
- That is why I said that in the beginning, I don't want it to come across as we are micromanaging
- But at the same time, it is like Chairman Morris stated, we are stewards of the public trust and the purse
- We do have to be mindful of that
- With that being said, trying to get \$38 million free with only a \$2 million investment is a very good investment in my book
- I would like to reserve any other comments for later

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- I think everyone here knows my love for education, my love for children, 36 years in the business that I enjoyed every minute of it
- Used to come up here with Board of Education
- Retired in January 2016 from the school system
- Didn't know how good retirement was, retired in January and in June that year was in London, England and Paris, France

- What got in my head – sitting up here now
- I would like to ask a few questions
- I retired in January 2016, ran, and won the election for county commissioner in November 2016 – a quick turn from education to county commissioner which as Commissioner Cox already stated is a lot different
- Part of our differences, as Commissioner Cox stated, is being good stewards of the county money
- The county taxpayers expect us to try to handle their money in a wise way
- I think the Board of Education understands that
- I don't think you can go up to any taxpayer and they would say that we can spend the money any way you want to – we don't care
- The taxpayers care how their tax dollars are spent
- I am going to go over just a few facts and then I am going to ask a couple of questions
- For all the people in the audience and for those watching, the County's total debt for schools right now is \$22,461,798.76
- That is what the County owes for the following:
 - Community College – Early College
 - Poplar Springs Elementary School
 - Southeastern Middle School – addition
 - Lawsonville Elementary School – addition
 - Nancy Reynolds Elementary School
- Some land had to be purchased for some of these projects – only a few
- Reiterated the total current school debt is \$22,461,798.76
- Annual payments are made for this debt from the county budget
- The fiscal year 2023-24 debt payment for those projects is \$2,885,289.99
- Wanted everyone to know what the current school project debt was – obtained these numbers from Finance Director Lankford and Interim County Manager Brown
- Confirmed with Finance Director Lankford the numbers that I just stated were correct
- The Board of Education has a stuff job
- During my five years being superintendent, we went through a school closing
- Confirmed with Commissioner Cox that she was serving as a Board of Education member during that school closing
- Consolidation and closing a school are never easy
- If you believe in your heart that you are not going to make anyone upset, you are going about it in the wrong direction – you can't do that
- You know that because you have been working through this quite a while; however, I will say this, I looked at the website tonight before I left home, and I think your enrollment on your website showed 5,519 students – please correct me if I am wrong
- What I have done to let everyone know, the belief for consolidation that our Board of Education has been dealing with, expressed appreciation to Chairperson Robertson and the Board for the hard work done regarding the consolidation thus far, I have done a comparison study of six counties around us regarding their number of schools and students versus the number of schools and students in Stokes County
- Provided both Board members with a copy of the comparison
- Want to make a brief statement of why I did this

- I retired from being superintendent on January 31, 2016
- Dr. Hobbs came in and filled out the remainder of the year, Dr. Rice has been here since
- In May of that year following my retirement in January, I received a call from Dr. Cotton, Superintendent, from Henry County, Virginia
- Dr. Cotton had a situation with 14 schools – 13 had met growth and one had not – he needed that school to grow
- Dr. Cotton ask me to come up to talk and then asked me to do an interim principalship for that particular school that had not met growth – I accepted that appointment
- That perked me up, I talked Todd Martin and several other people – Travis Reeves – made some trips together when we had our consortium at UNC- Greensboro
- As you can see on the comparative study: (had Interim County Manager Brown call each school systems' central office to obtain these numbers)
 - Surry County
 - 20 schools with approximately 7,000 students
 - Yadkin County
 - 14 schools with approximately 5,009 students
 - Rockingham County
 - 23 schools with approximately 11,000 students
 - Caswell County
 - 6 schools with approximately 2,173 students
 - Patrick County, VA
 - 7 schools with approximately 2,350 students
 - Henry County, VA
 - 13 schools with approximately 6,961 students
 - Stokes County
 - 19 schools with approximately 5,500 students
 - To be exact, I think the total is 5,519 students
- When you take the number of students divided by number of schools
 - Surry County = averages 350 students per school
 - Yadkin County = averages 357 students per school
 - Rockingham County = averages 478 students per school
 - Caswell County = averages 362 students per school
 - Patrick County = averages 357 students per school
 - Henry County = averages 535 students per school
 - Stokes County = averages 290 students per school
- Want the people in the audience to understand why the Board of Education is working so hard on consolidation
- 290 students per school for Stokes County
- You did not hear any other of these six schools that surround us below 350 – Surry County has 350 students per school
- The reason that I included Patrick and Henry Counties is real simple – if you know Stokes County like I do, drive past Sandy Ridge Elementary School about a mile and a half, and confirmed with BOE Member Duncan that you will enter Henry County, VA
- I worked in Henry County as an elementary school principal
- Go past Lawsonville Elementary School and past Peters Creek Church, confirmed with BOE Member Duncan that within a mile you will enter Patrick County, VA

- Wanted everyone to see that we have more schools with less students than surrounding counties
- Wanted that out there for facts along with the information that I have given you regarding debt
- When we did Poplar Springs and Southeastern Middle School, believe Commissioner Cox and BOE Member Rogers were both on the Board of Education, we got out money through a model called QSCB and QZAB which gave the County a better deal
- I will finish up here just by saying, I have listened to your last six board meetings, do you have a finalized plan currently for the consolidation of schools that you would make public to everybody in the county – question one to Dr. Rice and Chairperson Robertson
- Second question – did a new roof get put on King Elementary School recently – when was the last roof put on King Elementary School

Chairman Morris noted that the Board of Education could hold off answering commissioner questions until after all the commissioners' comments in order to give the Board of Education time to respond.

Director of Maintenance/Facilities Richie Roberts responded to Commissioner Mendenhall's question that the last roof was put on King Elementary School in 2007.

Commissioner Mendenhall continued:

- Have been in that school many times when I served as superintendent, seeing teachers, principals, custodians, - tried to meet with everyone
- Was in King yesterday and drove through the entire King Elementary School property – even though I had been there many times in my life, I wanted to refresh my memory before our joint meeting tonight
- King Elementary School and Sandy Ridge Elementary School are old schools
- I was principal at Sandy Ridge Elementary School for three and a half years, I know how old that school is
- I guess my question is – what happens if the county commissioners agree to give you the \$2 million for the grant and if you don't get the grant, this is sort of kind of hypothetical, so you may not be able to answer this question at this moment

BOE Chairperson Robertson noted that the \$2 million is not due unless we do get the grant, so if the grant doesn't come through, there is no \$2 million upfront.

Commissioner Mendenhall continued:

- Confirmed with BOE Chairperson Robertson that you do not have to put the \$2 million up front
- My other question is – what will you do with the current King Elementary School if you don't get the grant to build a new King Elementary school – need the Board of Education to be thinking about that
- That is all right now

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- I want to start by saying that education is vital, it is paramount

- I think for any city, any community, any county – you have to have a good education system
- It not only sustains the quality of life and community involvement, but it also advances it
- If you don't succeed in the level of opportunity for our students, our future leaders, then eventually it will show with the leadership in the county and then we will all fail – it will be a failure
- We all know that we have to consolidate schools, been talking about it for years and years, long before I ever thought about running for the Board of Commissioners
- At some point in time, we have to sit down, and you have to plan
- I thought we kind of did, the Board of Education did their internal planning going back and forth; then funding was allocated for the Masonboro Report that was done, the ORED Report that was done, and the facilities report that was done
- The level of need to our infrastructure here in Stokes County is shocking
- Shocking and I do not want to blame anyone because it doesn't do any good
- We have the problem now and we have to solve the problem
- I am ready to solve the problem – at least help solve the problem
- I don't even blame the past Boards because they all just went on what the citizens wanted which was low taxes
- If the citizens were not happy with the quality of life that was going on, they would not have kept voting them back in
- Everyone just keeps voting them back in, so apparently it is not their fault
- It is not like they ran on the fact that they were going to change things and did not change things
- I ran on changing things
- I am just one vote, but I am also one mouth, and I am going to do whatever I can to change things and help lead change in Stokes County so we can get caught up in the 21st century
- The frustrating thing is that we just don't have to look after the local part of the school funding, we got a whole county to run
- Our public safety does a great job with what they have, I come from law enforcement, and our public safety is forty years behind - forty years behind
- Do you know what struck me yesterday – I was on the school system's website
- We are approximately only a couple of miles from the school system's central office, the difference between our computer system/network/computer capabilities and yours is shocking
- It is like we are back in 1979 and you are actually current in the 21st century with your capabilities
- But yet we send half, which is dedicated right off the top of what is received from property taxes revenue straight down the road
- Department of Social Services and Health Department are overwhelmed
- If we just had to sit here and say automatically to just take the money because we got a lot of money – just do it – but the issue is that we don't have the money
- We represent the whole county
- I want to get the school situation right

- I will say right up front that I don't mind finding the \$2 million to give you all, but I want to know where you are going to put the school and I realize you have stated on the same location but a different area
- I see the traffic congestion but like Commissioner Cox stated it is probably just two hours a day – maybe King can work through that
- Forgive me if I don't sound confident because when you lack strategic planning, and I am talking about us first – this County has never done strategic planning, but we are going to start
- I like to see plans
- Where I came from, we had projections to review regarding operational and budget planning
- It may be 2023, but I am already looking in the year 2026 – looking at revenue and known expenses that we have – looking at what we want to accomplish
- I understand what you all may say that we may not be here in five years and you all may not be here in five years, but that is no excuse in my opinion
- You still make plans, and it is up to the other people that come on the Boards to either run with it or run against it but then they are held accountable
- The way I think, and I know that I am a little bit different, I am just going to do the right thing and if they want to vote me off or if I don't want to run again and somebody takes my seat and says that guy was crazy – we are going back to 1988 again then that is fine
- That is the citizens that either voted them in or voted them out
- That is the way I look at it and that is the only way to operate an organization in my opinion – it is leadership
- We are not all going to get everything we want but if we plan and if we articulate I think to our people that we represent, we are not going to please everybody, but I think when we are leading a certain way then I can sit back and hold my head high and say this is what our intent was
- I have other comments but to move on quickly, one question that I have is your ideal student population number for elementary schools and for high schools
- Another question, like Commissioner Mendenhall stated, if we don't get the grant what are you going to do about King Elementary School but I want to take it a step further
- I appreciate BOE Chairperson Robertson and Dr. Rice inviting me to take a tour of King Elementary School about three weeks ago
- Even when I am on my tractor, I am thinking about what is going on in Stokes County everyday
- Since that tour I think about that school every day, that school should not be in operation in my opinion
- I know that I am not on the Board of Education, but in my opinion, that school needs to be closed
- When Poplar Springs Elementary School was built, wasn't it built so that you could add on to it – confirmed by BOE members that it was built to expand
- I haven't heard anything about adding on to Poplar Springs Elementary School, was that ever discussed during the planning
- I believe there is extra property in the front of the current school – Highway 66

BOE Member Rogers responded:

- There is enough property there to build a middle school, there is enough property there to add on, the problem is that we don't have the money as a county to do it
- There is not a grant out there to just add on to one elementary school

Commissioner Wood questioned why could you not just add another elementary school there.

BOE Member Rogers responded:

- Then you come into a bigger traffic congestion because Poplar Springs currently has 500 students with one road in and out into a two-lane road – it is not in King

Vice Chairman Chandler continued:

- I see the Sheriff's Office there all the time directing traffic

BOE Member Rogers responded:

- Yes, they are there for 500 students
- If you add King Elementary, you have just doubled that school
- So now you are putting more students at Poplar Springs than is currently at West Stokes
- When it was designed, it was designed to hold up to 700 students – core capacity
- It is at 500 now with approximately 440 students at King Elementary
- It is not big enough

BOE Member Knight commented:

- It is my understanding that there are grants for additions or new construction, questioned Dr. Rice as to whether this was correct – think that question has come up before

Dr. Rice responded:

- There are new construction grants and there are some for renovations
- School system recently received the \$5 million from this particular grant for roofs
- But primarily the goal of this grant is for new construction

BOE Member Rogers responded:

- So, if we added on to two elementary schools, we would have to receive two grants which would come out to the same cost as one new elementary school

BOE Chairperson Robertson responded:

- Back to Vice Chairman Chandler's question regarding desired student capacity at an elementary school
- It is my understanding, Dr. Rice, please correct me if I am wrong, the state average is about 450 students for an elementary school with the sweet spot being around 400
- I think if we added on to Poplar Springs Elementary School and took it to core capacity and had 700 to 800 students, we have an elementary school principal here, Dr. Rice and Commissioner Mendenhall would even say that 800 elementary students would be hard to manage
- Believe that would be what you would run into – trying to put too many students in one location

Dr. Rice responded:

- Especially when you think about it, while the core capacity is what it is, if there are 40 classrooms in a school for an 800-student school with an average of 20 students per classroom, those students would also have to go to specialty classes such as art, music, and physical education
- You could not get all those in a week, so you would have two art classrooms, two music classrooms, two gyms
- When you start getting into those size schools, for example, West Stokes has an auxiliary gym in order to hold the physical education classes
- Basically, you have to start having to double the school once you get into that size
- The 300 to 500 student school range is the ideal range with 400 being the sweet spot
- High schools would be 600 to 1,000 students to offer the things that you would want to offer - a good efficient school

Vice Chairman Chandler continued:

- So, in terms of closing King Elementary School and you had to close King Elementary School, not saying you do because you make that decision, but if something came up and you had to, what would be the plan regarding transferring students from King Elementary between Pinnacle and Poplar Springs or where else – you know the schools better than I do
- Is there a way to do that

Dr. Rice responded that there is always a way.

Chairman Morris requested to allow all commissioners to speak before answering questions.

Vice Chairman Chandler continued:

- One last thing, have had several people from the Walnut Cove area talked to me (not the mayor) asking me why Walnut Cove can't get a new elementary school
- I replied that was not my area but will certainly ask
- They also commented that Dr. Rice had made a comment during one of his presentations that he had thought about a new elementary school in Walnut Cove which you can answer later

BOE Chairperson Robertson noted that the Board of Education has thought about all these questions over and over the past months and have run every scenario over and over, haven't heard a question yet that we haven't already talked about and discussed.

Commissioner Wood commented:

- As of January 2, 2024, I will have 52 years in the construction business selling steel
- I have seen more schools built and furnished them than you all have ever seen
- I am project managing two schools right now in the eastern part of the state
- King needs a school; I don't want to argue with you
- I can't see a \$30 million school going on that site

- You are going to look at 10% for tearing down that old school to whatever it costs to build a school
- I deal and talk to school contractors everyday
- I am not going to quote and don't ask me, but I got square foot prices and hope you have
- I get updates on the lottery
- I have got a spreadsheet on the bonds that Mecklenburg County and other counties have gotten
- I just hate the site
- Come up with another site, please
- The question that I don't understand and would like explained in detail (I am sure you all have heard me say this before – I went through consolidation with North and South Stokes) I don't see how you can do this without redrawing the lines
- That is the part that blows my mind – I don't get it
- This is a change for everybody, I survived it, and I turned out alright
- I thought I was going to Lawsonville High School, then consolidation was done, and I was attending North Stokes High School
- I am for King, have family in King, I go to King
- You need a plan because King Elementary School (confirmed with Dr. Rice the oldest part was built in 1950) is old
- So, you are going to build a school on a site that is going to sit there 50 to 70 years, that is why the site selection has to be perfect, that is my construction view of it
- I have even bounced it off some builders who are familiar with it and their comments were – they are not going back there, are they
- Please reconsider the site selection

Chairman Morris commented:

- I have a few comments then we will let the Board of Education members respond to the earlier questions
- The fact of putting up only \$2 million for a \$38 million grant is a no-brainer
- I think our speaker made that comment and have also heard that from other places
- We agree that is a no-brainer
- To me, a bigger issue would be to get that grant and not spend it wisely
- I am not in near as big a hurry to get the grant as I am to figure out how we would spend it wisely and then get the grant
- Whether that would be this year or that be next year or whichever year because grants are available each year from this fund to you
- I don't think we have a great chance of getting it
- The criteria which they call the prioritization of what they are looking for to award the grants - seven priorities
 - Number one - Counties that are designated as development tier one areas
 - Number two - Counties with greater need and less ability to generate sales tax and property tax revenue
 - Number three - Counties with a high debt-to-tax revenue ratio
 - Number four - The extent to which a project will address critical deficiencies in adequately serving the current and future student population

- Number five – Projects with new construction or complete renovation of existing facilities
 - What Dr. Rice noted that they are primarily focused on new construction or complete renovations
- Number six - Projects that will consolidate two or more schools into one new facility
- Number seven - Counties that have not received a grant under this Article in the previous three years
 - Understand with new language, this will not apply to the application
- When you look at those criteria and what we have
 - We have a low debt-to-tax revenue ratio this year at approximately 10% - calculated annually (don't believe we would score high in this area because we don't have a high debt-to-tax ratio)
 - We are tier two county, and they are looking for tier one counties
 - As I understand it, your plan does not consolidate two or more schools into one new school – your plan takes an existing school and consolidates one other school into the new school
 - To me, you are closing an elementary school in each of the high school districts and building a new school in King at the existing location
 - In my opinion, your plan does not address critical deficiencies inadequately serving future student population because the plan has no future phases to it other than the one mentioned by Dr. Rice – seven years from now we are going to do something when the debt gets paid off
- Personally, if I was evaluating the grant with the current school plan, it does not seem to me that you would score every high
- Board of Education members can comment if desired
- Kind of interested regarding our previous discussion when I was county manager and we saw these big decreases in student population, and I asked how low does the population have to get before we start seeing some cost reduction in funding the schools – county funding
- Dr. Rice gave a good answer, he basically said that there is certain fixed cost with 19 schools and so forth
- I think that kind of got this discussion going, people thinking about this
- Now if you ask anyone, they say we have to do consolidation
- I think what Commissioner Mendenhall stated regarding the surrounding schools kind of backs that up
- But it seems to me that our discussion has moved from the strategic plan that we asked for – what I am looking for is a comprehensive, long-range plan that will allow us to do the needed budgeting
- It has shifted from that to – we have got to meet the grant deadline this year
- To me, I would not agree to separate the grant from the strategic planning that needs to be done
- To me, the grant is a component of a long-range strategic plan
- I think Masonboro gave us an example of what a long-range strategic plan looks like

- I think another issue which I think has been mentioned a couple of times tonight already, based on Dr. Rice's presentation at our last commissioner meeting, it seems to me it is a real high priority to do something with King Elementary now
- If you build a new school in that location, I assume those kids would still be there for four or five years till we get that done
- That issue with King Elementary looks like it is something that needs to be addressed next year if I was sitting in you guys' seats – getting those kids somewhere besides where they are at just based on all the pictures and descriptions that were presented at our last commissioners' meeting – the condition of that school
- Along with comments that Vice Chairman Chandler has made, I would make that a high priority of figuring some way to address that issue as well
- Would like to talk about the Masonboro Report, I have funded a lot of projects prior to getting to local government along with some being in local government
- Something like the Masonboro Report is like something that I would require before I would fund much of anything basically
- It is a comprehensive report, it has got long-range phases in it, (believe there are seven)
- A set of important criteria which are as follows:
 - To ensure that the study was done in a manner that would demonstrate objectivity the following criteria will be utilized:
 - 70% capacity or greater of each elementary school facility
 - Reduction in bus transportation cost
 - Improve cost effectiveness of school food services
 - Reduction in school facility operation
 - No child moved more than once to another school
 - Improve student education opportunities and achievements across the county
 - With all due respect, I don't think the plan you have given does not explain how any of the criteria listed in the Masonboro Report has been accomplished
 - Not saying that the Masonboro Report that was submitted is a perfect product
 - To me, it is a phase one of a discussion that should continue with Masonboro
 - Masonboro does this for a living – they are experts at this
 - Our Board and your Board are not experts at doing consolidation plans
 - You have the additional burden, the elected officials on your Board, of just about anything you do will be perceived as biased, political, and favoring some elected officials' agenda
 - I don't think you could hardly produce a report that wouldn't be interpreted by a significant number of people depending on who got taken care of and who didn't
 - I will go back to the no brainer comment, you have got to have an objective from a third-party set of experts to give you a plan based on input that you have given them
 - It doesn't have to be the first product that they deliver, it could be iterative process
 - That is what I am looking for – something that I can hand to Carter Associates for a funding strategy that will work for both the school system and the County
 - Just don't think you can do that with what you have presented so far at this point
- I believe the Masonboro Report suggests building an East Stokes Elementary School

- Why not other areas in the County, there is more than one option other than just building a new elementary school back in the same location in King
- To me, that seems like we are not really consolidating like we should – not really changing anything, we are just kind of doing the status quo
- We did this a few years ago with Nancy Reynolds Elementary – all this political, community movement – got to build that school right back in the same location because of some grant money the school receives annually from the Reynolds Foundation
- I think everyone can have an opinion regarding whether that decision to build it back in the same location was the right thing to do – is it sitting in the right location now that benefits the County
- I really feel like if we put this new school right back in that congested area that has the issues that it already has, I would be explaining to people long after I leave local government and why I did that
- I have a real problem putting it back at that location
- I am all in favor of supporting a grant to do a plan that is logical and makes sense and supported by lots of data
- I don't think we are there with the current proposal that you currently have
- At the last commissioner meeting we had, a lady flagged me down in the hall as I was coming in who is in the room tonight
- Her question was "is there any way you can make them start all over with this plan"
- I responded "no" that is not the way this works – we can't do that
- We do have a financial piece to play in this, so we do have some leverage with what happens with this
- I have never had any issue while serving as county manager or commissioner where I have had as much unsolicited feedback regarding the current plan that the BOE has
- It has all been negative
- I have had two or three people during the past week, call and lobby me to put the school back in the same location in King, otherwise, I have had lots and lots of input from folks that don't think it is well thought out; they don't understand why this one is getting this and this one is getting screwed; and they don't think the BOE has listened to their input
- The BOE had the decision to apply for the grant before holding a public hearing
- The BOE only had one public hearing and all the stakeholders out there in the County are making comments about that
- At least, they are telling me they are not being heard
- With all the public input that has come in, nothing has changed on the plan
- I am just reflecting exactly what has been said from the people who have contacted me personally
- After reading the Masonboro Report several times, even reread the report this past weekend, to me, it is just what I was looking for
- I really hated to hear it was being tossed and the BOE was going to do the plan themselves
- I think I will stop now, will have further comments

Both Boards agreed to a five-minute recess.

Chairman Morris and BOE Chairperson Robertson both called the joint meeting back to order.

Chairman Morris turned the floor over to BOE Chairperson Robertson for comments from the BOE.

BOE Chairperson Robertson started the comments:

- Want to start my comments with the Masonboro Plan
 - BOE has heard the Masonboro Plan thrown around quite a bit
 - Usually, we hear that they like the Masonboro Plan, it is a good, long-term plan just like Chairman Morris just spoke about before the recess, a good strategic plan
 - We were very excited about Masonboro coming to present their plan at our meeting
 - We thought it was going to be really good
 - But what people don't understand sometimes is what is in the Masonboro Plan
 - I am going to just hit some of the highlights – don't have a copy with me tonight
 - Phase one – close King Elementary and Pinnacle Elementary Schools which are both in King with approximately 570 students
 - These two elementary schools were going to be consolidated into Poplar Springs and Mount Olive Elementary Schools
 - Believe Poplar Springs and Mount Olive Elementary Schools would hold another 200-250 students
 - We would have close to 400 students that we have nowhere for them to go
 - To me, right off the bat was a red flag about the Masonboro Plan
 - West Stokes High School would remain the same
 - We would have only two elementary schools with nowhere near the capacity to hold all the students
 - I guess some of the students would be going to Nancy Reynolds
 - I guess the great shift would happen – going from Mount Olive to Poplar Springs from Poplar Springs to Germanton
 - I think it would keep working its way around the county or I don't know where we would put them, it is no telling
 - South District was really messed up, their plan would move Southeastern Middle School to South Stokes High School which would have a 6-12 grade campus with approximately 950 students (975 student capacity); trying to keep everyone separated and keep everything working – there is no way
 - In our plan, we even talked about moving Piney Grove Middle School to North Stokes High School making a campus of approximately 500 students (750 student capacity)
 - Our principals from Piney Grove and North Stokes along with Dr. Rice came to us and said it will not work
 - I think North Stokes Principal Rasey stated a sports car may hold ten people, but it is not designed to hold ten people
 - After we heard the comments from Dr. Rice and the principals stating it was not a good idea to combine Piney Grove and North

Stokes when you have 500 students in a 750-capacity school, I don't know how we could combine Southeastern and South Stokes when you have 950 students in a school with a 975-capacity school

- The proposed plan moved Southeastern to South Stokes, close Germanton Elementary, Walnut Cove Elementary, London Elementary, and Pine Hall Elementary – all four elementary schools would be moved to Southeastern
- You would have only one elementary school in the south district - Southeastern Elementary and one Middle/High School at South Stokes
- West District would end up with two elementary schools – Poplar Springs and Mount Olive
- The North District would stay with Nancy Reynolds Elementary, Lawsonville Elementary, and Sandy Ridge Elementary along with Piney Grove and North Stokes – the North District would stay the same
- That plan would take about 15 years to develop - in the 13th or 14th year, it talked about an East Stokes Elementary School to be built somewhere on the east side of the county possibly around Dillard
- That would take in part of Pine Hall, Sandy Ridge, part of Walnut Cove, for approximately 350 students
- With the declining population, you may end up in a few years with around 275-300 students for a new school
- Would that be a good idea, I think 10-15 years from now, time will tell if it is a good idea or not – we have discussed the same thing
- The Board of Education Plan does the following:
 - We are going to leave all three high schools the same
 - We are going to leave all middle schools the same
 - We have five elementary schools that we are not going to change mainly because of location, age of the facility, and condition
 - Nancy Reynolds Elementary, Poplar Springs Elementary, Mount Olive Elementary, Germanton Elementary, and Walnut Cove Elementary
 - That leaves us six elementary schools – King Elementary and Pinnacle Elementary in the West District; it leaves London Elementary and Pine Hall Elementary in the South District; it leaves Lawsonville Elementary and Sandy Ridge Elementary in the North District – to work with regarding consolidation
 - We can consolidate one of those schools in each District and have the room to consolidate
 - In the West District, we can't consolidate King Elementary and Pinnacle Elementary into Mount Olive Elementary and Poplar Springs Elementary – there is not enough room
 - In the South District, we can't consolidate Pine Hall Elementary and London Elementary into Walnut Cove Elementary and Germanton

Elementary – there is not enough room (could do one school but not two schools)

- In the North District, we can consolidate Lawsonville Elementary and Sandy Ridge Elementary either direction, but we can't do both
 - Either one of those two schools is only big enough for one of the other schools
 - If we closed Sandy Ridge Elementary and sent them to Lawsonville Elementary, half of Lawsonville Elementary still has to go to Nancy Reynolds Elementary in order to make room for the other students coming from Sandy Ridge Elementary which did not make sense to us
 - We thought it would be better to close Lawsonville Elementary and split them halfway between Sandy Ridge Elementary and Nancy Reynolds Elementary
 - If you close Sandy Ridge Elementary and sent them to Lawsonville Elementary and you take half of Lawsonville Elementary and sent them to Nancy Reynolds Elementary – that half going to Nancy Reynolds is not going to be happy about it, they are having to get out of their school for Sandy Ridge to come and be in their school
- So, when you look at it, it really boils down to a pretty single solution
- When you get outside of that main first round, as I would call it – closing three elementary schools, hopefully getting a grant to build a new school of King Elementary, once you get passed that, a lot of it depends on how much funding we have to work with
- We need to add on to Walnut Cove Elementary or Germanton Elementary if we are going to close London Elementary
- We are going to add on to another school somewhere to do any more consolidation
- There is no other easy way to do it without spending some money
- We think in six or eight years as Commissioner Mendenhall was good to show us the debt – the amount of the payment – the debt is paid out
- Ms. Moore can help me with that, probably in the next eight years or so
- I think in seven or eight years down the road, we will get a better view of what the population is doing, where the population is located, is it in King, in Walnut Cove, is the north side of the county growing or is the north side of the county continuing to decline, will we have to end up having to go with Piney Grove moving to North Stokes and make Piney Grove an elementary school
- Those will be questions that could be answered six or seven years down the road when we get a better picture of where the population is shifting
- I think for us to try to decide that right now - we can say right now that we are going to build an East Stokes Elementary in ten years and we are going to do whatever, but it may not be warranted to do that
- I think it is a little irresponsible on our side to come up with a long-range plan, if I was thinking about funding it, I would say put your funding in place that is going to be generating revenue then in six or eight years, we have got some money to work with
- To tell you right now exactly what that is going to be, I am not sure that anybody can do that

- There has been talk about getting Masonboro back to do another study -- they had been given the wrong information
- Well, I will tell you that Masonboro walked the halls of every school we have
 - Confirmed with Dr. Rice that they went and walked the halls of every school and saw what kind of room we had in the schools
 - They walked the halls at Poplar Springs Elementary School, if they thought we could add another 300 or 400 students to Poplar Springs Elementary School, I am not sure what they were looking at
 - To get them back and give them another chance to go back through it again, I don't know that is the right thing to do
- I think we are all in agreeance, everybody in this room that we are going to leave all of our high schools the same, we are going to leave all our middle schools the same, and I think that almost everybody agree that we have got five elementaries that we are not going to touch
 - We are not going to close Nancy Reynolds
 - We are not going to close Poplar Springs
 - Reiterated that there are five schools that we are not going to touch, we can't touch
 - It only leaves us six elementary schools
- That is what it boils down to so we have tried to make a decision on which we thought would be the best, where we are going to affect less students moving them around, we came up with the idea of getting a grant
- If we were lucky enough to win a grant and get \$38 million dollars and we do win the grant then Commissioner Mendenhall that is when the \$2 million is paid, if we don't win the grant, there is never any money forwarded for the grant
- It is a mute point
- It is not an easy decision, BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant and myself will be on the phone I don't know how many times talking about it -- discussing what if we do this, what if we do that, and the same with other BOE Board members
- We have been over it many times in our heads trying to figure out what is the best plan
- Like it has been said here tonight, there is no easy plan
- Funding, we met with the commissioners on two different occasions trying to get an idea of how much funding we might would have, could we renovate a school, could we add on to a school
- To this point, we have no idea what funding may be available, have not been told any amount of funding
- So, the plan that we are coming up with and consolidation doesn't cost us any money
- We went out and came up with an idea on our own that didn't cost us any money to do
- It doesn't cost any money to consolidate Lawsonville into Sandy Ridge/Nancy Reynolds
- It doesn't cost any money to consolidate Pine Hall into Walnut Cove/London
- It will cost some money to move some desks, move some books, move some personal items but we don't have to add on or do any kind of addition to the school or renovation in order to consolidate what we are doing right now

- I did the numbers one day, if we close King Elementary School this fall, we would probably be above capacity if we consolidate all those into Poplar Springs, Mount Olive, and Pinnacle
- We would be over capacity before we start in those three schools
- With the way King is growing, we would be in mobile classrooms year one – we don't have the room
- I believe there is a lot of King Elementary people here tonight
- A lot of people would agree that King Elementary is not the best school we have, right and you saw that in your tour
- I want to publicly thank Commissioner Chandler for coming over to King Elementary and walking the school with us
- I think it was very eye-opening for him
- Confirmed with Vice Chairman Chandler that it was shocking
- I even saw some things that I had not seen before
- When Principal Bryant moved the table in the little room beside the office, there is a 6-inch hole in the floor that is a sewer pipe
- Principal Bryant stated that the table is sitting there to cover up the hole in the floor
- We would love to have a different King Elementary, a different place we could put them to provide better for our students
- We don't have choices
- We don't have anywhere to put them
- It is tough decisions
- If we had funding, funding would be great, if we knew how much funding we are going to have in five years from now and how much might be available, then that would be great, we could maybe start making a better plan
- How do we do that, but right now the only thing that we can do is consolidate some schools that doesn't cost any money
- I don't know if I answered any questions or just kind of got on my soap box a little bit
- I hope that I answered some of those questions
- I will address the location of King Elementary School, I will say this too, the comment about congested traffic has come up:
 - A lot of King is congested, but at Poplar Springs Elementary, the School Resource Officer (SRO) stands out on #66 to help people get out of the school because of the number of vehicles coming out of the school – they direct traffic
 - I don't think we have to do that at King Elementary – there are two ways out to exit the school – Kirby Road and Main Street
 - Mount Olive Elementary and Chestnut Grove Middle Schools are located side by side each other – share some of the same parking lots
 - Back at the beginning of school when there was open house – they had to alternate their night for open house – they couldn't have open house on the same night because they could not accommodate all the cars
 - They have to use both parking lots of both schools in order to have an open house and accommodate the parents
 - They scheduled Chestnut Grove on one night and Mount Olive on a different night in order to have room

- If you ever go down Chestnut Grove Road in the morning, the traffic dropping kids off is actually setting out in the street – same when kids are being picked up
- To me, King Elementary is fourth on the list as far as traffic congestion
- If we are worried about traffic, congestion, and safety, then we are probably going to have to do something about Poplar Springs, Mount Olive, and Chestnut Grove before we ever get to King Elementary
- King Elementary is probably one of the better ones
- The problem is where Kirby Road goes into Old #52 – that is a NC Department of Transportation (DOT) problem – that is not a King Elementary problem
- If they would put a stoplight there or do something with the traffic, if you think it is bad around 2:00pm when school is letting out, go by there around 5:00-5:30pm when everyone is getting off work
- The traffic is backed up past the school trying to get out
- That is a DOT problem, do know that the City of King has also been working on that – heard they have been trying to work with DOT
- It is not a King Elementary problem
- The site at King Elementary has 22-24 acres, we can go up the hill where the old high school was
- It is a great area to build a new King Elementary School
- If we are lucky to get a grant or we get funding for a school, we can build a school up there
- Once the school is built, the students from the old King Elementary can be moved over to the new school – don't have to do what we did when we built Nancy Reynolds Elementary – tear the school down, put up mobile classrooms, move the students, build a school, move the students back, tear the pods down, we don't have to do any of that
- We can leave them where they are and then move them to the new school once the school is completed
- To me that is a pretty good plan
- We have got water and sewer
- If we want to move it somewhere between King and Pinnacle, then go find me 20 acres of land that has water and sewer that is not right next Mount Olive or Chestnut Grove or somewhere like that – we will look at it

Dr. Rice added that would be an additional cost to the County because you can't use the grant funding to buy land.

BOE Chairperson Robertson continued:

- I am going to guess that the land we would be buying is probably as much or more than the land that King Elementary sits on is worth
- I will admit that the land that King Elementary sits on is worth some money – 22-23 acres of land in the middle of King
- It is probably worth some money, but the alternatives are slim
- There are not many alternatives
- The sewer in King is not very widespread – is not developed as much as it needs to be

- If we can't get the school connected to sewer, will probably have to buy 100 acres of land in order to have a septic system
- I think Lawsonville had to buy additional land in order to build the septic system up there – confirmed with BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant that additional land had to be bought in order for a septic system
- Now you are getting into more money
- We have thought about a lot of these things
- We do feel like we have put thought into it, it is not a political plan
- Everyone is going to perceive it as political if they want to, but we feel like we are looking after the whole County
- We really don't know how much more that we could do to put thought into it and try to come up with a plan
- I feel like we did a pretty good job coming up with a plan that didn't cost us any money
- We are not coming to you telling you that we need \$15 million to renovate this school to keep it open or we need \$15 million to add on to this school; we figured out a way that we can consolidate and eliminate at least two schools, maybe three, and maybe even build a new school and get rid of the four old schools with no money except for the \$2 million grant match – that is not bad
- Will turn the floor to other BOE members for comments

BOE Member Rogers commented:

- If King Elementary goes away like you said and it needs to
- Now I am upside down with students without figuring in pre-school or EC, I don't have a place to put them because I am in max capacity above Poplar Springs, Mount Olive, or Pinnacle, that is based on core capacity, classroom capacity, and what students are enrolled today

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- You just made comments that when you were building Nancy Reynolds and the use of temporary pods

BOE Member Rogers commented:

- We have some at some of the schools right now, like Sandy Ridge, that were temporary in 1974 – they are still there

Vice Chairman Chandler noted that the current Boards are in charge right now so we can't blame somebody else

BOE Member Rogers responded:

- We know that once a pod goes in, it never seems to leave

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Confirmed with Finance Director Lankford that the last payment for the pods at Nancy Reynolds will be paid this year

BOE Member Rogers continued:

- We are using pods for the early college now
- I am data driven, like Commissioner Morris say, I looked at the study that we can go out to 2030 on population – where is it at, where is it going to be, what are the growth areas
- I shared this with Commissioner Cox, King is still in the red, it is still going to be the second largest elementary school in the King Elementary District – that is why we picked King Elementary
- Walmart didn't build somewhere else; they chose King because that is where the majority of the people are
- We are trying to keep the schools closer to where the students are; building a school to bus a child to it is kind of ludicrous
- You need to be where the people are – it is just a common business model
- Right now, if you follow the Masonboro plan, they are wanting to redraw district lines that puts 350 at North Stokes, 350 at South Stokes, and 500 at West Stokes
- But they also said that they wanted to be above 70% capacity
- At that point, South Stokes would be right at 35-40%, North Stokes would be about 40%, West Stokes would be at about 50% capacity
- Trying to bust it up with the numbers we have got – we are down approximately 1,400 students from 2010 – down a lot of students
- Looking at a 10-year projection, if you look at the numbers projected of students that are in the system, this is not a guess, these are in our system now and when they get to high school, here is where they would be:
 - Between North Stokes and South Stokes, you are going to have about 600 kids
 - A board in 7 to 10 years is going to have to either build a new East Stokes High School to get a manageable number or we renovate a high school and put everybody into two
- The Masonboro Plan also called for something that I found kind of humorous – Career and Technical Education, although, we are taking students and spreading them out and having fewer students per school, they are wanting to add a drone technology class, an agricultural diesel trucking mechanic class at South and an animal science one and two, an equine science, and veterinary assistant at North
- They are wanting to add classes when we get reimbursed per students
- Right now, our CTE, we are running right about all we have got but yet the numbers are going to go down so how are we going to add more services with less money
- It is kind of like you are faced with Department of Social Services and the Sheriff's Department, I will never forget about 5 years ago, I heard Commissioner Morris say when he was still the county manager – every service comes with a price tag, are you willing to pay it
- As we add services, we would have to add a price tag
- Part of the Masonboro Group Plan was also to add a quarter cent sales tax
- We tried that, it did not work
- I don't know if you guys want to revisit that because we are not a taxation authority -we don't have that power
- We can all talk about it but again it becomes money

- What it boils down to – why did we choose King - because that is where the key people are
- Why don't we move King Elementary, we need the money to buy property to put a new school
- When we come and hear that funding is an issue and we understand
- It is public record that the fund balance isn't the greatest in the world
- We are trying to do with what we have got and be good stewards of the taxpayers' money
- When you look at our budget submission, we give you a copy every year
- We didn't do anything but just a cost-of-living increase based on what we thought projections were going to be
- Trust me, if there is one accountant that I trust more than anybody in this world is sitting in the room today
- This is kind of where we are looking at – King is full, and we don't have any place to put it
- We are looking at a train wreck and we are just sitting here going how do we get out from underneath it
- Our grant is our buying a lottery ticket
- We are hoping we get it
- We are hoping that you all fund it, but if we don't get it, we are still upside down with no place to put them unless we move every student in Stokes County around to shuffle the deck
- At the public comments, you heard parents that did not want to move their kid, you are going to hear everyone one of them because now every child's nucleus of support and friends are now busted up for half of the County
- Because half of the County is in the northern district (King is only 18%) which covers 50%; Walnut Cove – South District (33 as far as students versus land mass size)
- So, Ms. Knight was right – we don't want to put kids on the buses any longer and I agree with that
- We don't want to make boundary lines any further to where we are having to bus kids further and a greater distance because they are already on the bus too long – we are just dealing with it
- If there are any other questions, go for it

Vice Chairman Chandler responded:

- I get with what you are saying, I get with what BOE Chairperson Robertson is saying, and I get with what Superintendent Rice is saying
- I don't have a problem with some of what you are saying, we have had conversations, we are wanting to know what your recommendations are
- What you are trying to do is play both worlds
- You are saying that you went ahead and came up with your own plan
- When we asked you doing the budget time, how much money do we have to have for renovations or how much money do we have to do this – that is not the way it works
- The way it works is you say what you want to do that you think is the best thing and you give us what that price tag is going to be, or you bring us options like we are going

through right now – it is in writing so we can have conversation when we are in the budget season

- Ideally, we would get it and put it in as a part of a strategic plan, so it is not tomorrow
- I think sometimes what we do is we sit, and we are the same way
- We set and we talk, and we are not talking with you all; you all are talking too but you all are not talking to us
- Then it comes to a boiling point to where we need action, we need a signature that says that we will fund the grant match
- Again, I am for the grant
- I am also for moving King Elementary students like asap
- No one has ever come to me in the position of a board commissioner saying that we have got to do something with King Elementary, it is a priority, come take a tour
- When I got the offer to tour King Elementary, I went
- Something needs to be done but you all aren't focused on that, you are focused on just building another school near King Elementary but yet the school is so bad, but you are willing to wait 8 years with these kids going to that school until we can free up debt
- That don't seem that urgent to me
- I don't have a kid that goes there or a grandkid that goes there
- I am upset, that should not be – that is what I am talking about
- I agree with what BOE Member Rogers is saying, you are exactly right, you are reading the stats

BOE Member Rogers questioned if we should come next week and ask for money for King Elementary School

Vice Chairman Chandler responded:

- Yes, you should have come last year, or two years ago, or whenever else

Dr. Rice responded:

- So, if we come next week and ask for three elementary schools because that is really what our County really needs

Vice Chairman Chandler continued:

- Show us the plan, show us the money needed

Dr. Rice responded:

- I guess that is the frustrating part because I understand what you and Commissioner Morris are saying – you all believe you get a plan then you look for the money
- I apologize, I was raised in a pastor's family and Luke 14 said don't build a tower unless you know that the cost is beforehand so you know if you can finish it
- I believe if you know what the money is then you can develop a plan that matches the money
- Instead of creating a plan and you all say no – we will have a \$150 million plan, no we can't do that, well then we will do a \$90 million plan, no we can't do that, well then we will do a \$30 million plan, well then we will do another plan

- If the answer is \$10 million, then tell us we have got \$10 million and we will know that we have got \$10 million to work with – we can figure it out
- If we know that we have got \$100 million, we know what we can do to figure it out
- It is hard to make a plan, I don't know anybody that has ever built a house without a budget first
- Even when I am trying to build a storage building, I know how much money I have and then I figure out what size I can build or if I just need to wait and not do anything because I can't build anything

Vice Chairman Chandler continued:

- I know what my needs are and then I go out and get the best price

Dr. Rice responded:

- We have 6 schools that were built in the 50s that are a need, that is not going away, they are 73 years old

Vice Chairman Chandler continued:

- Dr. Rice, I am your biggest supporter
- I agree, but put it in writing and give us some quotes, give us some ideas,
- King Elementary needs to go asap

Dr. Rice responded:

- Again, this is the frustrating thing to me
- I understand how boards work – three votes for a board but different people disagree
- Commissioner Morris has kept mentioning the Masonboro Plan
- Back in the budget season, Mr. Mendenhall said you have wasted your money, give me the money next time that was not worth the paper it is written on basically – it is not an exact quote, but it was close
- That is two people on the same board – one likes the plan, and one did not like the plan
- We have heard from people, we have been asked the question, what about a new Walnut Cove Elementary School or a New London Elementary School or those type things because Dr. Rice mentioned it
- I don't know many things that we have not mentioned
- The only thing that I can think of that we have not mentioned – we have not mentioned closing Poplar Springs Elementary School
- I think every other school at some point has been mentioned with being closed, renovated, or something
- We have mentioned an option of consolidating all three high schools in to one, so every high school has been mentioned
- Every middle school has been mentioned, it is always the comments that it can't happened
- I mean, no matter what we do, you hear those comments

BOE Member Rogers commented:

- Everyone is fine with consolidation as long as it is not their school that they went to or their grandparents went to

Vice Chairman Chandler commented that he knew that we did not have an easy job.

BOE Member Rogers commented:

- The ORED recommendation is that you close North Stokes High School – there is no reason for a high school or a middle school in the northern region of the district
- We know the people do not want that so that became a nonstarter just like the people that don't want to redistrict to pull kids from here to there to go to other places that are further travel times
- It also said that the least effective schools are Pine Hall, Pinnacle, and Lawsonville – so there are your financial dollars
- I am not saying that is our final vote but that is where we leaned with and that is where the consensus of the vote was
- That matches up with the population study that we had on page six that I shared with Commissioner Cox which says that Sandy Ridge is the growing area
- Again, it was all data based, there was hard concrete data
- We can't look out and see the kids that haven't been conceived yet, but we know where the ones that have been born and where they are residing now

Vice Chairman Chandler responded:

- Then of course you know the other thing that is the ace or wild card, I should say, we don't know what is going to happen such as homeschooling increasing, and also if the tax dollars are getting ready to follow the kid

BOE Member Rogers continued:

- So now you can see why we are hesitant planning six years out because Commissioner Mendenhall, Commissioner Cox, and I sat on a Board when Lawsonville was growing and needed to do something, it had 196 students then and ten years later, it has 108 students – remember less than 100 the state stops paying for you anyway

Vice Chairman Chandler responded:

- I disagree, you still have to plan, and then as the years go by, you can always alter the plan
- You don't just plan and lock it up in a cupboard over here and be blind and then in ten years, you open the cupboard to see what the plan is, and find that I need to spend money now
- If you don't have things in writing and you are not planning – we all have budgets
- It is like when you are planning to retire
- Normally a person doesn't wait to start putting money back two years before you want to retire

BOE Member Rogers continued:

- It is hard for us to plan for next year not knowing what the funding is going to be for the next year

Vice Chairman Chandler responded:

- I can't give you funding until you tell me what you want to do
- You give us a plan and we say yes or no

Chairman Morris questioned Commissioner Mendenhall if he had his questions answered yet.

Dr. Rice commented:

- They have a plan, they have consensus on a plan, but not voted on it yet

Commissioner Mendenhall stated to Dr. Rice that he did have questions.

Dr. Rice apologized to Commissioner Mendenhall - just wanting to answer the question.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- First thing I want is for Dr. Rice to repeat what I quoted this summer

Dr. Rice responded:

- You made a statement about the Masonboro Plan, and you said next time, why don't you give me the money, I can come up with a lot better plan than that, I believe that was the quote

Commissioner Mendenhall responded:

- I want to see that in the minutes somewhere because I don't ever remember saying that
- My memory is pretty good even though I am 67 years old

Dr. Rice responded:

- Again, I am not saying it is an exact quote, but I will look online and send it to you

Commissioner Mendenhall responded:

- I never said anything like that

Commissioner Cox responded:

- I would never say never
- I was there too, and you did say something along those lines
- I just heard what I heard

Dr. Rice responded:

- I apologize, it was not meant to be an exact quote

Commissioner Cox noted that it was not your exact words, but it was the gist.

Commissioner Mendenhall responded:

- Don't quote somebody unless you got the exact words

- That is my first thing
- Then I am going to say this, maybe everyone has forgot this, I ask for our Board to come up and hire Andrew and Doug Carter, who are our financial advisors, does anyone else remember that
- They said they would come up with a plan of how much money we had and what our debt ratio would be and what we would be able to do with that money
- Am I correct
- Confirmed with other Board members that was correct – Commissioner Mendenhall suggested to hire financial advisors to come up with a plan
- I was the one that brought that up and it passed on a 5-0 vote
- Confirmed with other Board members that it passed on a 5-0 vote
- Dr. Rice, until we get that group, I cannot sit here and tell you to call out three schools you want built and that I am going to vote yes right now, just can't do that
- You heard me read the statistics and our fund balance is not 25% or 30%, we are talking about probably 12%
- You know in your mind we can't fund three schools

Dr. Rice responded:

- That is why we have not asked

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- We are never going to go anywhere in Stokes County with that kind of philosophy of we are all here and there, you have got to have discussion
- Until you get down to the nitty-gritty, where we can figure out how much money it is going to cost, it is not like it is going to get built tomorrow, but we can find a pathway to get the stuff there and get it done
- If we just throw our hands up every single time and just say, you know what, we can't do it, can't do it, that is why we don't plan here, that is why it is a good excuse to say we don't know what tomorrow is going to bring and we don't have any money
- Will Stokes County continue to grow, will our public safety and our departments continue to grow
- With our education system, we will just have more King Elementaries where we will have more students setting in places that they should not be setting in
- Our 911 Center, all our infrastructure will be a mess and then we want to know why
- All the trends that I get in population study is indicating the elderly is moving into Stokes County, people like me – 64 or older

BOE Member Rogers responded:

- Questioned Vice Chairman Chandler if he reviewed the data on the website
- It gives the population study, and it shows in 2030 what our population will be and also where the heat map is now and in 5 years from now
- These are not the elderly; these are children born per the Stokes County Health Department residing in the County and what areas they are in
- It is not going to account for any growth in King because those houses haven't sold yet

Chairman Morris asked if any other Board member had any unanswered questions.

Commissioner Cox commented:

- Don't have any questions at the moment, but I feel like Dr. Rice was fixing to answer a question.

Dr. Rice responded:

- I was just going to answer the questions, as I did write them down
- We have a plan, the Board has a consensus, not an official vote, not unanimous, but as a Board
- The roof at King Elementary School was done in 2007
- What are we going to do if we don't get the grant, I guess we will come to your Board and ask for money
- The needs are not going away if the grant doesn't come through - then an ideal elementary school 300 to 500 students, a high school 600 to 1,000 students
- Have I mentioned a school at London, yes, but again we have mentioned Germanton, we have mentioned London, we have mentioned a lot of schools in the last seven months
- Was that mentioned in a meeting, if you go to other meetings, other things were also mentioned
- Those are the questions that I had that I wanted to make sure we answered

Chairman Morris noted that the Board of Commissioners would have one last round for questions or comments then we will allow the Board of Education to comment unless anyone disagrees – both Boards had no problem with Chairman Morris' suggestion.

Commissioner Cox started off with the following comments:

- I would like to touch on the Masonboro Study that has been mentioned
- I will go on record as saying that I would never be in favor combining, myself personally, South Stokes High School and Southeastern Middle School, as that study says
- The night that he presented, I asked one of those retired superintendents in that group, I asked him to tell me how he would address the athletic situation
- He responded – put the kids on a bus and send them back Southeastern to practice and use the fields at Southeastern
- I said that time would not allow for that, I was on the school board for 15 and ½ years, that is not going to work
- He had no idea as to how the athletic situation would be addressed
- I just don't think that is the wisest idea and with that being said I would not be in favor of doing that at North Stokes High School and Piney Grove Middle School either
- I think we need to do everything we can to keep our high schools and middle schools open
- Another one of the problems that I mentioned to him about the Masonboro Study was when they stated to close and combine Pinnacle and close King and put them at Mount Olive and Poplar Springs, but had no mention in the study of even renovating or adding classrooms

- I was on the Board when we built that school, you can expand it and you did not even mention that in the study which is a huge flaw right there
- Redistricting and uprooting the greatest number of kids for what reason, I think the whole goal should be to limit the number of students that are having to be uprooted in the County
- Moving the students just one time, I am not sure what he means by that, except that they would go to middle and high school at South Stokes

BOE Member Rogers responded:

- They would only change elementary schools one time is what they were trying to get to

Commissioner Cox continued:

- That just doesn't make any sense, with that being said, I do think down the line, an East Stokes Elementary is probably something that we should plan for
- I think these two Board should start regularly trying to plan once a year, strategically planning ahead
- I agree with Vice Chairman Chandler, the planning is a big thing, even if we, like he said, and I have said it before myself, we can plan all day long but none of us may be sitting here in 5 or 6 years, but that does not mean that you don't plan
- I do believe that you do plan and try to come up with solutions; collaborative and strategic planning between our two Boards, I think, is key
- I think that what has happened in the past is that Board members on both Boards were so worried about getting re-elected, they never did the right thing
- I think it is time that we stop that and stop trying to just worry about that and just do the right thing for kids
- At the end of the day, put these students first, like we say that we are going to do
- We just need to practice what we preach on that
- I would recommend that the Board of Education form some type of committee with school personnel and community members, promote community engagement and try to figure out what to do with London – that is a huge thing right there
- We need to figure out some type of preservation committee that needs to be formed
- Even if that school can't be used down the road as a K through fifth grade elementary school, it could be utilized in other ways, the Arts Council has lots of good ideas, art-based elementary schools are huge all across the United States, the Appalachian Folk Schools are huge, and it is something that I know the Arts Council has looked into
- There are a lot of issues for that school
- Planning needs to start now about that school and how to keep that school viable in the community
- I wish the people who get on Facebook and give us a hard time would roll up their sleeves, get involved and do the work instead of just being on there mouthing all the time about what we are trying to do because do we make all the right decisions, no
- We are not going to, but we do try, and I think it is in the best interest of the kids of what we are trying to do here

- It is not our job to micromanage the Board of Education but at the same time, we are fiscally responsible for the funding and have lots of other departments that are way behind times that Vice Chairman Chandler has previously mentioned
- That is all I have right now but do want to thank the Board of Education for meeting with us today

Commissioner Wood commented:

- Will be short
- Number one, I have made the comment more than once that I am overqualified for this job because I have too much common sense
- Questioned what is the square footage for the new King Elementary School, is it going to be the same square footage as the current school

Dr. Rice responded:

- It is going to be a little bigger, we have not got that far in the planning stage or looking at blueprints

Commissioner Wood continued:

- Next question, if you can't tell me live, you can tell me after the meeting, what architectural fees are running now

Dr. Rice responded that he did not have those figures available but would get with Commissioner Wood after the meeting.

Commissioner Wood concluded that is all he had.

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- I think I have already said a lot, I just want to emphasize that I am not against you all
- I want to work with you all, you are the experts when it comes to education
- I want to see something put in writing or just tell me some options that has money associated with the options
- If we can't get support to do whatever, then so be it
- In my opinion, you have got to try
- I am going to try very hard, not with just the schools, but with the rest of the County what is in dire need as well
- We have just got to have honest communication, no politics, what is best for the County
- I have to be honest; I was shocked when Commissioner Mendenhall brought up our financial planner, I never knew Stokes County had a financial planner and I was impressed with that
- I want to thank Commissioner Mendenhall for bringing that up
- We just need something that we can show our financial planner, believe he was a prior city planner who has a lot of experience
- He is not going to go on roundabouts, he wants to know exact money, plans, and what all it entails in order to advise the County about financing these items

- That is all for me

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- I don't have much
- I know the Board of Education has a tough job, we have a tough job, all 10 Board members have a tough job
- I certainly don't envy the Board of Education right now
- I don't envy us either, but I don't envy you all especially
- Someone made the statement, and I am not going to do an exact quote, but someone made the statement – no matter how you try to consolidate, some community is going to be upset – not sure which Board member said that, and I am not going to try recall their name
- Somebody made the statement basically that if you close two or three schools and consolidate them into one, the schools that get closed are going to have some upset citizens
- That is just reality, it is reality
- I feel for the Board of Education, I have not gone to any of the Board of Education members and tried to get you to work a certain way because that is your job
- That is not my job
- It is not my job to tell you which schools to close or consolidate
- You have five Board of Education members – that is your decision
- Reiterated that he would not be telling the Board of Education what to do – that is their decision
- That is all

Chairman Morris commented:

- I would just say, based on the feedback that I have had from the public primarily, plus my own opinion as well, compared to Masonboro, I think the current recommended plan is kind of arbitrary and incomplete
- It looks to me like we are just going to close some schools, build a new one, and then wait and see what happens next, then react to whatever that is
- To me, that is not the proper approach to go about this business, it is about process and having a good process to figure this out
- When you do the local solution, nobody wants to redistrict anything, I happen to believe you have to redistrict in order to fix these kind of issues
- Masonboro stated that this was the most complex situation that they had seen, I think, during that presentation
- To me, it further supports the need for having an expert company that does this for a living to come up with the final plan
- I can't believe that you just take the first iteration, and you don't like stuff in it, and you just toss it and go off and do this on your own – makes no sense to me why you would not get them back, give them scenarios, give them your issues, and let the experts who will provide a non-biased, non-political, objective, professionally done plan

- I would encourage folks that are watching us and are in the room here, go read the Masonboro Report and look how they went about doing the recommendation and then compare it to what you have heard tonight about this current plan
- I would disagree with the comment that was made that it is irresponsible to do long-range planning – disagree with that and we have talked about that enough
- I think a lot of the public in a lot of the County has a real problem with what we have come up with so far
- I am willing to work with you all, if you go back to Masonboro and do a couple of iterations with them and they say replace King Elementary School in the same location, I will be right there supporting it
- Just know that without redistricting and perceptions that are going around, I think we really have a lot of work to do collectively to come up with something that I can support
- Like I have said before, I am just one vote on this Board

BOE Chairperson Robertson commented:

- Do have a question, we do hear a lot about redistricting that you just spoke about, what do you mean when you say redistricting

Chairman Morris responded:

- Moving district lines to make the plan work and not worry about how close somebody is to the current school that they go to

BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant responded:

- Could I ask a question to that – do you think that it is okay for a kid that lives across the road from Chestnut Grove to come to the north side of the county

Chairman Morris responded:

- You can't have it both ways, if you are going to support the bigger plan, you can't have everybody going to the closest school to them just because it is convenient

BOE Member Rogers responded:

- You also can't redistrict just to kind of almost fill up a school or back fill for a school that doesn't have the enrolment
- We are not trying to fix an overcrowding, we are trying to fix an over capacity, are we not, that is the whole reason for consolidation
- We have more capacity and older buildings than we have students to fill them
- So, moving students from this area (up here or down here), the Masonboro Plan that everybody thinks is the gospel is taken from the west and the south to put them into the north area so that those schools can be at 50% capacity and south schools can be at 50% capacity and west schools can be at 50% capacity
- We need to get where we are at 80% to 85% capacity to be efficient

Chairman Morris responded:

- May I state that I don't think the Masonboro Report is gospel
- I think it is the first iteration of two or three or four iterations with them that will produce a really good plan for you guys
- It really can't be challenged by anyone – they are going to challenge your plan all day long

BOE Member Rogers responded that basically we followed the ORED Plan.

Chairman Morris continued:

- If they are unhappy about the Masonboro Report or someone like them that do this for a living, that takes an objective, non-political, non-biased look, they have expertise, they do this for a living
- We don't do this for a living, none of you guys do this for a living

Commissioner Cox commented:

- Why would they not have any answers to my questions if they do this for a living
- If they are such experts, why could they not answer my questions

Chairman Morris responded:

- If you don't like them, hire somebody else

BOE Member Rogers responded that the Board of Education did hire someone else, they hired ORED.

BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant noted that the Board of Education had two studies done, not just one.

Chairman Morris responded:

- The ORED was nothing compared to the Masonboro, in my humble opinion

BOE Member Duncan responded:

- ORED was focused strictly on transportation

Chairman Morris added that he felt the ORED Study was a component of the Masonboro Plan.

BOE Member Duncan continued:

- I reached out to Dr. Rice about getting Masonboro back
- Dr. Rice stated it would be \$5,000 for Masonboro to come back to answer questions, not to do an iteration, just to answer questions
- Hope maybe we could do a zoom call for a lesser amount
- We talk about Masonboro a lot, it would be nice to get them back
- There is a difference between a plan and an action
- To be honest, I voted to where we are at today
- Looking at it, was it the best decision, I don't know

- It is one of the hardest decisions that I have had to make, I guess as an adult, almost feels like it
- There is a difference between a plan and an action, and we are taking an action
- I think the consensus of the Board of County Commissioners is we need a strategic plan and that means doing XYZ
- Last time I checked, where we are class size, class offering, what is best for our children and what opportunities they have
- That is what we are about, buildings don't educate a person but being in a building that is fallen like you had said at King Elementary School
- King Elementary School is one of a few that is bad, there are others that are bad as well
- If the Board of Commissioners is asking for a strategic plan, I don't disagree with you a bit
- I think we need to go back to the drawing board because I did notice in all of our plans that we came up with they had us apply for a grant, getting the grant, and building the school
- We are not guaranteed a grant on any of that
- I don't know how many times Ms. Moore has whispered that in my ear when we have talked, we are not guaranteed a grant
- So, I think if that is what I am hearing tonight from everybody is maybe we need to go back to the drawing board and not just make an action and say that is a plan
- We need to know what we are going to do – this, that, and the other to the schools that are being affecting
- Wrote down a few things:
 - Facility condition is one – you can see the facility study just like I can
 - The best they can get is 15 on a scale – it was plumbing, mechanical, and electrical
 - Maintenance Director Richie Roberts can attest to a lot of this
 - I did the same thing that every citizen can do – go through and do simple the simple math
 - Reiterated that the most you can get is a 15 which is the best condition and a 0 if it is bad
 - I am going to read them because anyone can:
 - London Elementary School = 2.5
 - Pinnacle Elementary School = 3.5
 - Sandy Ridge Elementary School = 5
 - King Elementary School = 5.5
 - Pine Hall Elementary School = 6
 - Walnut Cove Elementary School = 7
 - Germanton Elementary School = 8.5
 - Lawsonville Elementary School = 8.5
 - Mount Olive Elementary School = 19
 - Nancy Reynolds Elementary School = 15
 - Poplar Springs Elementary School = 15
 - After all, some of the other elementary schools are not in the best condition
- I guess my thing is as it sounds like to me as one Board member on the Board of Education, before we can go further from the standpoint of maybe getting support from

the Board of Commissioners and do understand that the Board of County Commissioners do not decide the schools to close, we do – we have to decide

- It has been said that we don't listen to the community, I can't speak for everybody, but everybody that I have talked to – they don't like our plan
- I know I don't talk to everybody; I am sure there are people for it, people that are against it
- I know no matter what strategic plan we come up, it is not going to please everybody
- I am a pastor; I understand about not pleasing people
- You have heard the roar in the crowd about one high school
- From a business model, strictly business model, if you are looking at operating a business that is the most cost-effective thing – building one new high school, have the old high schools to be middle schools – have already talked to BOE Member Bryant about this
- You can do that and close a lot of the smaller elementary schools – that being the most effective model
- But I have got to live in Stokes County, there is emotion, and there is that behind the scenes
- It is a balance
- We represent not just the ones in this room but the ones watching, the ones who elected us
- I don't care about getting re-elected
- I told my wife I should have listened to her and not get elected – not run
- I got on the Board of Education to help the students – try to make sure there was not a liberal agenda that was pushed down our kids' throats like what was happening all over America
- I didn't get on the Board of Education to close schools or whatever
- I want to make them better whatever that looks like
- I am not married to what we are doing, at that time when we were going through it, it made sense
- I told Chairman Roberston early into this when we talked about Pine Hall, if we are going to close one, we need to do it in all areas
- Looking back, I don't think that was the right decision, in my opinion, that is my opinion because every area of the County is different
- The north side is different from King
- King is different from Walnut Cove
- At the end of the day, we are one Stokes County, and we have to figure out how to make that work – we have a mountain in the middle of us
- The reason I take this so seriously if you want to stay up late at night watch YouTube, we are not the first people that have consolidated schools, go on YouTube and type in school consolidation
- It has ripple effects in the community, they are not always good
- That is the thing that we have got to focus on is that the decisions that we make just don't affect the 100 or 200 kids in that school, it affects their families, it affects a lot of other things

- Just sitting here listening, my takeaway is we need to come up with a plan that is best for our kids, whatever that price tag is, and figure out from there if we are going to apply for a grant, if we are not, get funding from the County
- That is my takeaway, instead of action, reaction, we have seven plans but instead of having them applied for grants that is when we come to you and say we need money for this elementary school, we need money for this high school
- That is what I took away from it
- Questioned Commissioner Mendenhall regarding when would the Board of County Commissioners have information from the financial advisors

Commissioner Mendenhall responded:

- The Board of County Commissioners has given the financial advisors a deadline to have the information to the Board by the next budget cycle – Carter Associates who were here in the early 2000's
- This should give us information about how much the County can put into schools
- Can't give you an exact time but suspect March would be the earliest

BOE Member Knight confirmed with Commissioner Mendenhall that this would be like strategically planning for all your other county departments – weigh out the needs.

Chairman Morris responded:

- It all boils down to is what we are willing to do – we have a 10% debt to tax ratio
- We could borrow \$300 million if we can justify to Local Government Commission right now

BOE Member Knight commented:

- Confirmed with Chairman Morris that even with the \$2 million match to the grant or \$300 million, both equals an increase in taxes especially with the current fund balance
- Sometimes what I find even more difficult and I am in a more rural area of the County, telling certain communities, families, or students that I am sorry, but your school is going away, and you will be going somewhere else – this may be difficult for you but hopefully you will make new friends and get better with it, etc.
- Oh yes and by the way you still won't have things such as preschool and special needs that we don't have in the northern side of the County right now
- The list goes on regarding the things that are available and not available but you have to go outside the northern district to receive them, continue to have less and try to figure out where we need most to repair poor structures
- It sounds like it is an extremely poor facility that needs great attention as Member Duncan read off from the facilities' list
- This makes it more difficult for me
- As all of you have said, this is a very complex issue
- Solving this problem is not easy
- I just worry without you guys knowing what you can do, all the needs on the table and looking further down the road with a long-range plan

- I have mentioned about putting kids into an older school like we have proposed with this current plan, how long will that last – putting 300 kids in an older school
- An older school that already has 175 and taking on several more, how long can they last
- Could even be rated worse than the school you are considering replacing
- What is the next phase when the option has run its course
- Think we are going to have to look further down the road
- Another one of my big issues is a plan with stability like Member Ducan mentioned – not all areas and districts are the same
- Some closures affect it worse because the next school is not four miles away
- So just considering something that offers stability in each district if we are truly trying to keep the high schools in place that we currently have
- I hear what you guys are saying, it should be like you want to support growth, change and we have to replace some old school, but maybe just not with this current plan and need to look further down the road
- Am I hearing, are we going to look further down the road
- What is beyond the consensus of closing three schools
- What is the end goal
- That is what I am understanding from you, Vice Chairman Chandler, what is the next step in all this

Chairman Morris noted that we need to predict what this is going to cost us.

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- The Board of Commissioners needs to know what the need is
- We don't need to build swimming pools and stuff like that, I am talking about your immediate need
- One of the big things to me is the immediate need when you have got schools in a state, if we have more that are worse than King Elementary, I would hate to go through those schools
- To me that is an immediate need, then you phase into what is needed next – other new schools, renovations, etc.
- We just need to know what you need and want so we can then find out if we can accomplish this
- We can't write a check in one day or one year for everything, but we can get funding
- I know this is a terrible thing to say or a terrible thing to think but yes sometime in life costs go up, they do, we have got to fund things, we are required to fund things
- I think as long as we show the public, no one likes paying more taxes, I get that but we all like services, too
- I think along with public safety, I think education is right there – we have got to have quality education
- I don't want you to feel like that you have to not ask for something that you consider is a need that it is going to be just arbitrarily just disbanded because it is not

BOE Member Knight continued:

- Mr. Mendenhall pointed out a lot of our current debt, this may be a question for you ladies, if you close a facility that you have current debt outstanding, are you writing a check immediately to pay off the debt
- How does that work

Chairman Morris responded:

- That would be left up to the lender

Interim County Manager/Clerk Brown responded:

- We have reached out to the bank that we have the loan through to ask that question
- Their response was it is for an educational use, know it has been mentioned for a district office or another school, or whatever, the loan structure will be fine
- If it changes to any other form or use other than an educational use, the County will have to go back to the bank and basically get them to approve that change of use
- At that time, the bank will decide if we can keep our current loan structure or if the payoff will have to be paid in one lump sum – depends on the usage

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Had asked that question earlier and had Amber and Lisa check into that because some of the schools on the list that we owe on
- I am not singling one school out, but I will just say Lawsonville has been mentioned
- Confirmed with Finance Director Lankford, that the County currently owes \$965,880 on Lawsonville Elementary School
- We have to go to our financial banker, if it is used for educational purposes, we are okay, but if it is used for anything else, we would have to make a one-time payment of \$965,880

BOE Member Knight continued:

- I have also been, I would say the odd man out by being the only woman on the Board, but I also agree with what Mr. Duncan had mentioned as far as yes Masonboro is not perfect, and I have heard everybody's varied opinions on that tonight
- When you work doing that every day, I am not opposed to tell them what we can tolerate and what we can't and that they need to reformulate a few things but would need to see the data attached to that
- The public piece, yes, it definitely lacked as far as public buy-in; telling the public this has to happen, but not telling the benefits that we would see from it in the different areas
- I have really struggled with that
- The one public hearing was very disheartening
- I encourage the school board to work on a longer-range plan and fine tune some of the details for sure and go from there
- I do not know if Mr. Bryant had anything, he is the only one that has not gotten to speak yet

BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant commented:

- Have thought about it and thought about it

- We have done a lot of talking back and forth -- several of us have
- One thing that I can't live with is making the north district any bigger, it is already 52% of the County and has less than 1,000 kids
- I can't go to the Forsyth County line so that I can get 500 kids at North Stokes
- I am sorry, I can't, I am not going to, I will never vote for that
- That is what I see when you start drawing maps and stuff and dividing up the schools to get them equal
- On the eastern side of the county, you have got to go all the way to Forsyth County
- My daughter went to North Stokes and to Piney Grove, we live closer to Southeastern and South Stokes
- From where I live, it is 10 miles closer to South Stokes than it is to North Stokes, but she went to North Stokes, got a great education, great school- I am sort of partial to it
- But the thing is that I can't move it to where other kids are driving 10 miles to South Stokes, but drive 25 to North Stokes
- I just can't do that
- We have got to figure out the redistricting
- This County has been redistricted enough when you got less than 1,000 kids in 52% of your county
- That is a major problem with me
- Masonboro drew the lines going down Volunteer Road right by Chestnut Grove Middle School
- You live across the road from Chestnut Grove Middle, can throw a rock in that yard, you were supposed to go to North Stokes and Piney Grove
- That is too far
- I don't know the answers but redistricting in that situation is definitely not it
- We might could tweak it a little bit but not much

Chairman Morris added that was what he was saying – meet with Masonboro and tweak it.

BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant continued:

- Went through Lawsonville the other day heading to Pilot Mountain by Piney Grove Middle up Lynchburg Road
- I hit the zero on the mileage counter at the Lawsonville Post Office, when I got to Venable Road which is the line for Pinnacle and Nancy Reynolds, it was 15 miles
- I drove all the way across half of Lawsonville and all of Nancy Reynolds in 15 miles
- When I am sitting there looking at what we have got to do, we have got to close some schools, we don't have a choice
- It is not that we want to do one study or the other study, but when Masonboro comes out here and they look at that school that will hold 800 kids - yes, the core capacity is 800 kids
- Problem is that there are only enough classrooms for 500 kids – they based their whole study off the core capacity of the schools instead of classroom capacity
- That study is worthless, I am sorry
- The numbers are so skewed there is no way it could be viable

Chairman Morris commented:

- Dwayne, it is the first iteration

BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant continued:

- But how many more times, like Chairperson Robertson stated, they walked through every school, they met with everyone of us, they even asked me what can you live with and what can you not live with
- Each one of us met with them, I think they met with some of the commissioners, I don't know if they met with everybody or what – didn't they meet with you guys

The Board of County Commissioners all confirmed that they did not meet with the Masonboro Group.

BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant continued:

- Sorry, I was told that they were meeting with some of you, but they did not

Commissioner Cox commented:

- If you think consolidation or closing a school is bad – redistricting and redrawing the lines are just as bad
- It is just as bad or worse than the other because we had to move the line between South Stokes High School and West Stokes High School – that was just as bad

BOE Member Rogers commented:

- The 3 schools that we are looking at consolidating are all on the Masonboro Plan

Commissioner Cox asked BOE Member Rogers to repeat that.

BOE Member Rogers continued:

- The three schools that are potentially to be closed are closed within phase one or phase two of the Masonboro Plan

Commissioner Mendenhall requested BOE Member Rogers to please list those three schools.

BOE Member Rogers responded:

- Pinnacle, Pine Hall, and King Elementary are all in phase one
- Phase two is Walnut Cove, Germanton, and London Elementary
- Lawsonville is right in there also because it comes with the new develop of plan for closing Lawsonville and Sandy Ridge Elementary for the new East Stokes Elementary School
- Then it turns Lawsonville into an alternative school
- The first iteration has two alternative schools instead of the one that we have now
- If you follow ORED, if you follow Masonboro, both of them close the same schools
- Then it comes down to funding

- Everybody that has contacted me is upset because the school in their district is going to be closed
- I have not had the first call from anybody saying oh please close my school, I am mad
- Now it becomes a funding issue in current expense
- If we are going to be reduced in funding because of your budget levels, then we simply have to close schools
- We have to decide what we are going to do to give these kids closure and time to mourn the closing of the school
- With the last current expense budget, we requested \$17 million, and some change based on what we saw our expenses go up from the previous year to this year
- We received \$15 million and that is going to about empty our fund balance, so we are not going to have a fund balance
- If the same trend continues, gas has not gone down that much, so if we are at \$18 million, is that still a fundable model on your early budget projections
- If we are going to consolidate to save money and produce a better education product, but we are going to wait and go with a second or third iteration of the Masonboro, if we chose to go that way, that is going to take time and we are going to have to keep these schools open – we can't do it without funding

Chairman Morris responded:

- Do that, keep them open until you figure it out, that is fine

Vice Chairman Chandler also responded:

- Keep the schools open until we can get a plan to move forward, submit a budget to us to keep the schools open

BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant commented:

- So you are going to fund the \$2 million that we asked for this year and again next year and the year after

Chairman Morris responded that is all based on how you justify it.

Vice Chairman Chandler responded:

- It is like I asked Dr. Rice when we had the meeting with the budget thing, and I appreciate him being honest
- We are looking at line items from the local funds that we are going to approve
- All five of us on this Board can sit here and ask about this line item, this line item, this line item, etc. and give the money to the school system
- Then as soon as it hits their bank account at the school system, he can move the money as he see fit
- We don't see any amendments that are coming over from our finance director because it is not a department of the county
- To me, it is kind of ridiculous to go line item by line item for the local part of the funding given to them from the County

- We have to trust him to do his job and the school board to over see what he is spending the money on
- I am for you telling us an amount of the local fund and if it is agreeable with the five of us, I will give you the full amount
- You can do with it what you want because you are going to do it anyway because you can
- I have to trust that you are doing the right thing with it
- If you are going to do a pet project and leave one of the schools not being funded and don't want to pay for the utilities or whatever that is on you – not on me

Chairman Morris added that he would give that money based on a plan, not without a plan

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Morris confirmed with both Boards there were no further comments.

With no further business to come before the Boards, BOE Chairperson Robertson entertained a motion to adjourn the Joint Meeting.

BOE Member Rogers moved to adjourn the Joint Meeting. BOE Vice Chairperson Bryant seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

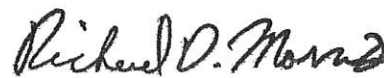
With no further business to come before the Boards, Chairman Morris entertained a motion to adjourn the Joint Meeting.

Commissioner Mendenhall moved to adjourn the Joint Meeting. Vice Chairman Chandler seconded and the motion passed unanimously.



Amber Brown

Clerk to the Board



Rick Morris

Chairman