

**GATES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 4, 2015**

The Gates County Board of Commissioners met in Special Session at 10:00 a.m. Friday, September 4, 2015 in the Board of Education, 25 Main Street, Gatesville for a joint meeting with the Gates County Board of Education. Commissioners Hofler, Owens, Jordan, and Freeman were present. Board of Education members Glendale Boone, Leslie Byrum, Claire Whitehurst, Daniel Dickerson and Ray Felton were present. Also present was Natalie Rountree, County Manager, Dr. Barry Williams, Superintendent, Dr. Jim R. Watson, WSRR Consulting Group, LLC and Mr. Randy Baker Pinnacle Architecture, P.A..

Board of Education Chairman Glendale Boone called the meeting to order.

Dr. Watson and Mr. Baker introduced themselves and shared a little of their background.

Dr. Williams welcomed everyone and stated this is a meeting to discuss opportunities for Gates County and the potential for a new Central Middle School. It is important to talk about what we can do and the possible solutions instead of continuing to only focus on the problems that are facing us.

Joe Harrell, Director of Maintenance for Gates County Schools, shared information from Farkas Architecture. Central Middle School 7th and 8th grade campus is from 1955 and the Department of Instruction has stated it will be more costly to renovate the facility rather than build a new school. It is estimated to cost 1.5 million more to renovate than replace. The Department of Instruction is requiring the school to undergo changes to increase energy savings as well as solve wastewater, mold and mildew issues. The efficiency of a new building will save in funds, staff maintenance and possible legal actions by teachers and students. Mr. Harrell recommends following the recommendations that are being presented. Pinnacle Architecture builds common sense schools that are economical. It is beneficial that we have the land and sewer already, this will reduce costs. Currently there are no ADA accessibility and we are being told that walls and major systems must be changed to add an ADA compliant bathroom at the front of the building. The school system has recently spent between \$14,000 and \$15,000 to patch the roof. Mr. Harrell shared a letter he wrote to the Board of Commissioners and invited each member to meet with him individually at Central Middle School for a tour.

Ray Felton, school board, stated the Department of Instruction will not come to the meeting to express their concerns because they will not openly express concerns in a public meeting, they are more about helping to provide recommendations rather than condemning schools.

Mr. Harrell stated it will cost three quarters of a million dollars to replace the roof on the 8th grade building and ½ the 7th grade. It will cost approximately 1.5 million more to renovate the school.

Ms. Rountree, County Manager asked how long the Department of Public Instruction been consulting with the school about the issues. Mr. Harrell has been working with them for 2.5 years on recommendations for Central Middle School. Ms. Rountree asked the Board of Commissioners if they have been aware of the specific issues or have they just been aware of the general concerns about all schools, the roof at Central was not listed as a major priority in last years requested funding. Mr. Harrell stated for 7 years the roof has been on the capital improvement list but recently the patching is not sufficient and there are more leaks. This past winter the standing ice created more leaks and the Department of Instruction is advising differently so it is a top priority now. The entire roof is constructed wrong; it was meant well but constructed wrong.

Leslie Byrum, School Board, informed the Board that there has been a teacher to file a claim against the School Board for working in an area where there is mold and mildew the

Board settled and paid the doctor bills. There was then a second complaint about mold and it was in a different area, this is when it was discovered that there was a larger mold issue.

Mr. Harrell provided further explanation about the construction of the roof and the potential for the roof to cave in at spots.

Commissioner Jordan stated the Board knew there were problems but it has recently been magnified and confirmed that the school Board feels that Central is the biggest concern even though some of the other schools are just as old. Mr. Harrell stated the roof at TS Cooper and Buckland are designed differently and do not pose as large of an issue as Central. TS Cooper and Buckland have maintenance issues not structural issues.

Commissioner Hofler, Chair Board of Commissioners, stated the high school has had leaks for 30 years and is still leaking. Mr. Harrell explained the high school roof was installed on a metal deck unlike the other schools and although it has zone leaks and leaks at some of the seams the structure of the roof is the best roof in the system.

Dr. Williams turned the conversation over to Dr. Watson.

Dr. Watson, WSRR Consulting Group, stated in reality citizens should be proud of how well the building has served students during its tenure. Dr. Watson said he has built several schools and middle schools and Mr. Baker has a reputation for building sufficient schools that are economical. As you compete with neighboring counties for development you are competing on the school front also. Schools can add a lot to a community and can help encourage development. We are in an environment where we are always strapped for money and decisions are based on low bids and if you have a building that last for 40-50 years then it has served you well. Those before you had to make decisions based on the funds they had available and wanted to build things that would get them through 40-50 years and now that time has passed and you are faced with the same decisions. Dr. Watson talked about a combination of funds that could possibly be available and explained there is no magic answer or formula to fund the building of a school.

Dr. Williams opened up for dialogue and questions.

Commissioner Jordan asked what the estimated cost of a new school would be and said he would like to see a breakdown between the costs to build new vs renovations. Ms. Whitehurst reminded the board that you have to provide a temporary location for students while renovating which is part of what makes the cost higher than new construction.

Commissioner Hofler asked about population trends and what size school would be built. Superintendent Williams stated the population has been declining and they are just over 400 enrolled now at Central Middle School. Mr. Baker recommends building a school with a core capacity of 600 and knowing that your population may fluctuate. The actual classroom space may be built for 400 with the option to add classrooms but core space would be a capacity of 600. Commissioner Hofler asked what the estimated gallons per day of wastewater per student would be. Mr. Harrell said a new school would be 25% less than the current school due to new energy efficient fixtures and no leaks.

Commissioner Owens feels that going forward there doesn't need to be a lot of convincing about the condition of the school, the Board is aware and not surprised; the building has served its purpose. We need to know the numbers. Commissioner Owens asked if the School Board has considered adding 5th and 6th graders in the new school. The School Board said you could mix them but it is not recommended. Commissioner Owens said we don't need to build something that we know we may grow out of. Money spent wisely can prevent a lot of heart ache in the future. The Board is faced with how to pay for new construction, they need to know numbers and dollar figures.

Commissioner Hofler asked if there is a 10 year or 20 year plan in place of all of the schools and what the most sufficient way to spend the money is. We need to look at the organization of all the schools from pre-k to seniors. Commissioner Hofler asked if there is a possibility we could merge two schools and consolidate. Mr. Byrum feels you can't really do away with Buckland because transportation costs would increase greatly. The new 6th grade wing can be converted to an alternative school and be open at night for a

community college to do night classes and serve as meeting space. There are a lot of options including possibly even a stem lab which would increase the opportunity to receive grant funding.

Dr. Dickerson stated the School Board is thinking outside of the box and trying to find ways to use the schools for revenue, ways they have not been used in the past. Dr. Dickerson reiterated a long term comprehensive plan is needed and would like to see it provided to the Board of Commissioners.

Ms. Whitehurst explained we can do so much better if we come together to form positive solutions to our issues. We are trying to think outside of the box and unfortunately schools reach a point where they have to be replaced.

Mr. Harrell said John Farkas with JKF Architecture estimated it would cost \$18 million to build a new school and \$19.6 million to repair the school and to provide temporary relocation is another \$200-250,000.

Commissioner Jordan clarified that the plan is to have a new school and save the 6th grade wing and cafeteria of the old school for different purposes.

Dr. Williams talked about the possibility of some USDA funding opportunities based on the free or reduced lunch rate.

Mr. Watson said they would bid a 70,000 square foot building at \$150 per square foot. They estimate building a new school for \$12.6 million for construction of building which doesn't include furniture, kitchen material and demolition. If you added all of these costs in they feel the school will come in less than \$15 million.

Mr. Baker stated Pinnacle Architecture has built many schools and the firm is consistently building the most economical schools. Mr. Baker said they have not been hired by the Board they are just present to provide information.

Commissioner Jordan feels the next step would be a request for proposal to allow different firms to put in a bid if the Board of Commissioners agrees to look into financing the project. Both Boards need to start talking about ways to finance a new school but we need hard facts.

Sandy Pittman, Gates County Finance Director, informed the Board of Education that a 1 cent tax increase brings in \$90,000 we are looking at 15-20 cent increase on the tax rate. The last school project won't be paid off until 2022.

Commissioner Hofler asked about possible funding for consolidating schools. Dr. Dickerson said it could possibly be considered consolidating or merging by having the alternative school and the middle school at the same location.

Commissioner Owens said we are all aware of the scenario and we have two good Boards with good management support. If we embrace the situation together and let the leaders in the room get the teachers, parents and community excited about the future we can get folks on board. We can't ignore that the tax rate has to increase and that is never popular, each Board needs to be making great statements and embracing the situation. We need to make sure the community knows that the Board wouldn't consider increasing tax to just get tax money a tax increase would be to help children and the community.

Commissioner Jordan feels if presented correctly there will be support from the citizens of the county to help outfit a new school after it is built. It may be beneficial to consider talking about changing the tax rate at the same time the rates change during revaluation.

Commissioner Hofler said we can add the topic to the next Board of Commissioners agenda but information about population trends, costs, sources of funding and how the Board of Education plans to contribute to the funding is needed before we can move forward with requests for proposals.

Dr. Williams said he can outline the information and present it to the Board of Commissioners at an upcoming meeting.

Dr. Dickerson reiterated we are past the stage of this would be awesome for the county we are to the point that this is needed for the county so while we need to review and present more information we need to act quickly.

Mr. Harrell feels Dr. Watson has the experience to guide the School Board and the opportunities for funding can get them to where they need to be.

Both Boards discussed the possibility of working jointly with community colleges to increase class offerings.

Mr. Felton reiterated we need to do things right the first time, it is cheaper to do it right the first time.

Ms. Rountree asked about the building timeline. Mr. Baker said for a core capacity of 600 it would take about 14 months.

Commissioner Hofler stated the Board looks forward to receiving more detailed information at an upcoming meeting.

Adjournment

Chairman Boone adjourned the joint meeting.



Linda Hofler, Chairman



Melissa C. Lawrence, Clerk

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