BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA
JOINT WORK SESSION WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD
MINUTES
DECEMBER 6, 2022

CALL TO ORDER – Ms. Vanuch stated that the Board of Supervisors was already in session from their prior ARPA work session.

Ms. Patricia Healy called the School Board to order.

Ms. Healy asked the Clerk for a roll call. The following School Board members were present, Ms. Patricia Healy, Dr. Sarah Chase, Ms. Maya Guy, Ms. Alyssa Halstead, Ms. Maureen Siegmund, and Dr. Elizabeth Warner (remotely) and various staff members. Ms. Randall was absent.

Dr. Sarah Chase moved to allow Dr. Elizabeth Warner to participate in the meeting electronically. Ms. Alyssa Halstead seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Ms. Healy said that Ms. Randall was unable to participate in the meeting due to a death that occurred in her family.

Mr. Coen said that he would have to leave the meeting early due to being needed at home.

Ms. Vanuch said that there was only one agenda item today, which was the discussion of the FY24-33 Technical Review Committee recommendations and additional options through the work session for the Capital Improvement Plan.

FY2024-33 TECHNICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND ADDITIONAL OPTIONS

Ms. Andrea Light said that this was an opportunity for the School Board and the Board of Supervisors to discuss the contents of the Technical Review Committee's recommendation, along with viewing other options on December 6 to accomplish additional projects. She said that this was an opportunity for them to all speak and discuss the projects and the needs of the schools.

Ms. Light said that beginning with debt capacity, which was the limitation of what could be borrowed over a 10-year period, they found that the debt capacity increased to over $147M. She said that they had updated some of the assumptions, going from a 3% budget increase to a 4% budget increase. She said that when looking at the last 10 years of actual increase amounts, it was a 4% increase, so it grew the capacity. She said that they also increased interest rates from 5% to

5.5% due to the market, so that reduced it by a small amount. She said that the increase of $147M gave a total debt capacity of $731.8M.

Ms. Light said that during the CIP last year, there was a lot of discussion about a possible bond referendum and what that might look like for school projects, fire and rescue projects, or other County projects. She said that a bond referendum essentially would mean that in April, they would determine the School Board-requested projects that may or may not be included in the CIP, and which of those would be included in a bond referendum. She said that the Board would vote to authorize that in July, and then it would be added to the ballot. She said that gave the ability for voter input to give a citizen response, and if they voted favorably, she assumed that in December, they would hold this annual meeting that would include a discussion of how to move forward with the bond referendum. She said that they would also have to have a discussion if the referendum failed.

Ms. Light said that if approved by the voters, they understood what the community wanted, and it served as a good feedback mechanism. She said that a few years ago, the Board used this to look at transportation projects, and they had the overwhelming support of over 76%. She said that she also looked at all of the referenda on this past ballot that were for construction projects and bond issuances, and all of those passed favorably throughout the Commonwealth. She said that while it was not a predictor of what would happen in Stafford County, it gave reliable information.

Ms. Light said that they still had to issue general obligation debt. She said that even if a bond referendum passed, it meant that the citizens said that they could issue the debt. She said that that debt still had to fall within their debt capacity and limitations, so the referendum was about a mechanism to talk with the community, and this Board had started to do some of that work by talking about their capital needs. She said that at the December 5 meeting, the Board asked for them to look at the change in debt service that the schools requested. She said that it was about a $151B request from the schools this year, equating to 5two cents of the tax rate if all of the projects were approved within the 10 years.

Ms. Light said that there were projects that were assumed to be included in the CIP, and for the schools, those were Hartwood Elementary School, High School #6, and schools funded through the 3R annual bond projects. She said that Hartwood and the high school had already been funded from the County's perspective. She said that they had some projects with some 100% dedicated revenue, most of which would be proffers, or in the case of transportation projects, it would be state and federal money. She said that under the Technical Review Committee's recommendation, they were limited to what was allowed within the policy and debt capacity. She said that they ranked the projects and put the schools all up together.

Ms. Light said that Drew Middle School ranked the highest for safety issues, and they could see where the rest of the schools fell in relation. She said that what this did not do was align with the School Board's request and how the Board requested to have the projects and the priority that the School Board put on their requests. She said that due to the limitations of the TRC, this was strictly one through wherever they could get to. She said that they were able to add in the high school bus access road, which scored 27, but was a $5M project that they were able to squeeze into the capacity, and with the knowledge that Middle School #9 and High School #7 were coming, they put some planning dollars in those outyears.

Ms. Light showed a graph of the County projects, which she said included a couple of fire stations, a courthouse, and Garrisonville Road widening, which was a transportation project. She said that not included in the TRC recommendation, not because the projects were not necessary, but because of funding limitations, were the activities and aquatic center, additional fleet services facility, Elementary School #20, Ferry Farm rebuild, and UMW acquisition and renovation. She said that about the fleet services building, what was proposed by the School Board was 50% of that building. She said that County staff had not looked at what fleet services facility they would need, so they felt that this project needed more staff-to-staff work before it was completely brought back.

Ms. Light said that they provided the Board with three funding options. She said that the first was the status quo, which was the TRC recommendation. She said that if none of their assumptions changed, this was what it would look like. She said that the second option was a two-cent fire levy, and the third option was a two-cent fire levy and a four-cent real estate tax increase.

Ms. Light said that funding strategy 2, the two-cent fire levy, had a cost of $80 per year. She said that they were able to fund $47.2M in fire-related projects, and it freed up debt capacity for additional projects. She said that while the fire levy did not necessarily impact the schools directly, it did indirectly due to the additional debt capacity allowed. She said that the timeline was for this to be considered as part of a bond referendum in November of 2023, and would begin in June of 2024 when they would begin collecting the revenue that was the direction the Board took.

Ms. Light said that under the fire levy and these other two options, staff took a bit of a different approach than the TRC recommendation. She said that they attempted as best as possible to align the recommendations with the School Board's priorities, beginning from one to as far as possible for the School Board request, putting them within the 10 years as the School Board had requested. She said that Drew Middle School was there, but Elementary School #19 could be placed before Drew Middle School, so those were options to consider as the discussions progressed today and throughout the CIP process. She said that they removed the rebuilds for Falmouth, Stafford, and Grafton Elementary, which were lower on the Board's priority, in order to fit more in. She said that they replaced projects with Rising Star Replacements.

Ms. Light said that information had been distributed among the meeting members. She said that the first one was the TRC recommendation. She said that the last page had the school projects in the layout. She continued that in the fire levy, they were able to add Elementary School #20, and the North Stafford Fine Arts Wing and renovation and addition. She said that the TRC did go to North Stafford to look at the Fine Arts Wing, and the teacher there did a fantastic job of giving a tour and describing the needs of the school. She said that they were also able to add the Rising Star Replacement.

Ms. Allen (microphone not on) inquired about doing the Fine Arts at one location, but rebuilding North Stafford.

Mr. Taylor responded that it was currently on their CIP to have that project. He said that they would have to look at a North Stafford replacement in the near future, and it would not be a part of this CIP. He said that they would have to look at this at the tail end of the next CIP or at the early part of two CIPs down the road. He said that they were 20 years away from a North Stafford replacement, but it was time to think about the timeline for retiring North Stafford. He said that while that was a part of the conversation, there were needs at North Stafford that were pretty dramatic in the Fine Arts Wing, which was why it was still a part of the CIP.
Ms. Allen said that she thought that the timeline was much quicker, because Embrey Mill had not yet finished building out, and she thought that perhaps North Stafford was meeting its capacity sooner.

Ms. Light said that the bolded items on the screen were ones that had made any changes. She said that there was a significant impact to all of the fire station rebuilds, and the joint training center/logistics/fleet for fire and rescue. She said that no other changes were made for County projects. She said that the projects not included were the elementary school rebuilds to focus on the capacity.

Ms. Light said that strategy 3, the fire levy two-cent increase and real estate four-cent increase, would be an average to their taxpayers of about $240 per year to get to this level of funding. She said that there were significant improvements within the schools. She said that Drew Middle School could be moved up two years to start the replacement in FY26. She said that Elementary School #18 began in FY24 in all scenarios, but Elementary School #19 would move up two years and Elementary School #20 moved up two years. She said that Rising Star was able to move up three years. She said that included adding the public day school, although that was on the tail end of the CIP.

Ms. Light said that this would be a significant improvement as compared to the other two models, and they tried to go in the order of the School Board, and it was a 1–20 exercise. She said that what improved on the County side for this was to move the courthouse up five years, and there would be no other changes due to the fire stations being addressed. She said that Garrisonville Road was a transportation project, so that funding and timing were set. She showed on the screen the projects that were not included in strategy 3.

Ms. Light said that this was the beginning of the CIP process, and the CIP process in Stafford was a 16-month process, and this was the beginning of staff working with the Board and School Board about what this looked like. She said that on December 13, there would be a CIP work session with the Board of Supervisors to ask for direction on what should come back in the proposed CIP, and that would come back on March 7.

Ms. Light said that there was a joint Board and School Board meeting on March 21, before the tax rate was set, which was another opportunity for the Boards to discuss what was in the proposed CIP and how it would or would not meet the needs of the schools. She said that a follow-up was planned in case the discussion was extended, and there were public hearings scheduled for April 4, with adoption following on April 18.

Ms. Vanuch asked her colleagues if there were any comments or statements to be made before opening the floor to the School Board.

Ms. Allen asked if the four cents was additional to the current tax rate.

Ms. Light asked for clarification.

Ms. Allen asked if it would be an additional four cents added to whatever would be proposed in April.

Ms. Light said that was correct. She said that the four cents was classified as capital revenue.

Ms. Allen said okay. She asked how they determined it to be four cents and not two cents.

Ms. Light said that they had looked at two cents and four cents. She said that two cents did not create much of an incremental change, and it was not until they got to four cents that they saw that there could be an impact on the CIP.

Ms. Yeung asked why North Star was no longer on the list.

Ms. Light asked for clarification. She said that Rising Star continued to be on the list, and it was the replacement for Old Gayle Middle School.

Ms. Yeung asked Ms. Healy about the room that was supposed to expand North Star. She asked when they rebuilt Rising Star, where they planned to put the kids.

Ms. Healy said that she believed that they would stay in the current structure until the new one was built.

Mr. Fulmer asked if Ms. Yeung was referring to once the building was complete where the children attended or why they were rebuilding it.

Ms. Yeung asked if they were using the same land when they rebuilt the school or if it would be located somewhere else.

Mr. Fulmer said that they had looked at options at the same site and options to switch with the Drew Middle School, so that if that school was rebuilt, it could be done on the Rising Star site and vice versa, providing an opportunity to keep both schools operating. He said that they could build on the athletic fields at Drew and co-locate so that they could build on the new site.

Ms. Yeung said that they had talked about North Star having more room and expanding that since more kids would be coming to that area anyway.

Mr. Fulmer said that when they rebuilt Rising Star, it would be with expanded capacity.

Mr. Taylor said that the campus at Rising Star was substantially larger than North Star, and even if they doubled the capacity of North Star, they would not be able to put all of the Rising Star students in there, even temporarily. He said that by doing the building construction in a way that optimized the space they already had saved a lot of money and allowed for the buildings to stay open while they were doing construction safely.

Ms. Gary said that Stafford L would not be undergoing renovations, so there would be a new elementary school. She asked where that new elementary school would be located.

Mr. Taylor said that as they had it scoped in the School Board's adopted CIP, they would recommend a replacement on site of the property. He said that they would do construction when it was time to replace that building, and its useful life was coming to an end within the next 10 years, along with Grafton Village, Falmouth, and Ferry Farm. He said that they recommended for all of those buildings to construct on the property and utilize the same strategy of saving money by constructing on the available property while the school was still open.

Ms. Gary asked what capacity would be available to add as the school was already overcrowded and the space was limited due to the nearby neighborhoods.

Mr. Taylor said that they would add 233 seats.

Ms. Healy said that that would be in 10 years, but they had discussed Elementary School #18 and #19, and while there was not an official vote, they had generally discussed #18 as being in the vicinity of the new high school in the southern end of the County, and #19 being located in the central part of the County, along the corridor where Stafford Elementary was, because it was an area that had significant need. She said that the southern area was already overcrowded and utilizing trailers and would continue to do so until #18 and #19 were built.

Ms. Bohmke said that she saw that they had taken out the three elementary schools. She said that when they redid Grafton, Falmouth, and Stafford L, she recalled physically walking through those buildings, which had been stripped to the studs, had all of the HVAC replaced, and everything had been done over. She said that it was close to being a total rebuild except for the beams and bricks. She said that she was on a state advisory board that looked at the capital construction of new schools with School Board members and VSBA members, and she had heard about many other great school problems in the state. She said that she was unsure of why these buildings must be rebuilt and asked if someone could educate her.

Mr. Taylor said that as Ms. Healy had said, "that was not the house that was on fire right now." He said that the current problem was the current seat deficit, the projected seat deficit, and the 115-classroom deficit in the next three years. He said that they absolutely must address those needs first. He said that as far as Falmouth, Grafton, Stafford L and Ferry Farm, one of the things they had consistently heard from constituents was the question of why they were not planning ahead and thinking about existing infrastructure.

Mr. Taylor said that while these buildings had been recently renovated, and one was currently undergoing renovation, with mixed results of renovations, they needed to plan for the end of their useful life. He said that by mapping out some likely scenarios of when this could be, whether moved back or forward in the timeline, the projects that required additional capacity to manage growth showed the crux of the Board's target and focus right now.

Ms. Bohmke said that she appreciated and understood that. She said that the community did not understand as much as those who were sitting at this table, and if they were going to put a bond issue out before the voters, they may not want to include those few schools on the list, because it complicated things and muddied the waters. She said that while those were definitely things that needed to be taken into consideration, they may not surface for the next three or four years. She asked if the Hartwood that was shown on the first slide was the Hartwood that would go next to the new high school, or if it was a rebuild or renovation of Hartwood. She said that Rising Star was the current Gary Melchers complex. She asked if it was correct that they would knock that building down after the new Rising Star was built, and how many and what age of children would be housed in that building.

Mr. Taylor said that they absolutely advocated for the replacement of Hartwood Elementary School. He said that they did not think that this was the best bet for this right now, the reason being seat capacity. He said that they also thought that a Hartwood elementary school could go closer to the high school as the urban service area expanded and if the project was timed accordingly. He said that the School Board was advocating for the construction of a new Elementary School #18 to go into the southern part of the County. He said that lots of discussion could be had in closed session with both Boards about land acquisition and placement.

Mr. Taylor said that they believed that the south was the place for that project, and there were logical places they might presume to be a good fit for that. He said that Elementary School #19 and its new construction would take the place of #18 on the list, and Hartwood would take the place of #20, because they knew that project needed to get done. He said that they again ran into a seat deficit and classroom deficit, and if they could ballpark it at about 50 classrooms for elementary school, in three years they would have 115 classrooms in deficit, which was more than two elementary schools, so they knew they needed additional seats and spaces.

Mr. Taylor said that prioritizing the seat count and classroom count was more cost-effective and strategic, as well as being able to get everything accomplished that they wanted, which was a rebuild of Hartwood Elementary School, a new construction in the south, and a new construction in the central area to relieve pressure in the Embrey Mill zone, Stafford L zone, and also accomplish some of these other things. He said that the direction they were advocating for the Board of Supervisors to consider was a movement of projects to maximize their seat and classroom capacities at cost.

Ms. Healy said that their view of Elementary School #18 in the southern end would also provide immediate relief to Hartwood when it opened.

Ms. Allen asked Ms. Light if the four-cent tax would be over a 10-year period.

Ms. Light confirmed this.

Ms. Allen said that she respectfully disagreed with Mr. Taylor about not being as concerned about the schools that were to be rebuilt in the future. She said that it was something that they should consider because with the bond referendum for roads, people made assumptions that they would be able to solve every issue, which was not the case. She said that they did not want people to say that they had earmarked $450M to fix the schools and then come back and ask for another $400M to fix other schools. She said that they should make voters aware of the needs instead of making it sound a certain way. She said that they should give all the pertinent information and allow the voters to make the decision.

Ms. Allen said that as a taxpayer, she would assume that this would take care of all of their issues, and she did not want to see as a taxpayer another additional raise in taxes for additional schools that needed repairs and replacements. She said that while they said they had time, capacity would drive that, and in five years, if Widewater hit capacity, they should have a plan now for that replacement and not wait until the capacity was hit, so that they were not buttressing these obstacles with rising costs and tax rate issues.

Ms. Yeung said that she never thought that the high school was a very serious issue, and did not vote for the high school, but she had lost that battle. She said that she was always more concerned about the elementary school, wherever it was placed, to alleviate the pressure on Garrisonville. She said that Drew Middle School was also at the top of her list. She said that they had dates for the schools, but she would like to know about the acquisition of the land.

Mr. Taylor said reiterated that these were not their suggested dates, and their timeline was much more aggressive than this. He said that the School Board's adopted CIP was a lot more aggressive in terms of project completion in terms of overdue projects that were identified. He said that for example, they would not recommend that Elementary School #18 or #19 open any later than 2026.

Ms. Yeung asked Ms. Light why they were showing this. She said that when she was on the School Board, the TRC did not speak to the School Board about how they looked at their needs. She said that at one point in time, she asked the School Board and the County to come up with a solution and agree on the list. She said that right now, the School Board did not agree with the list, so she would like to know how this could be resolved.

Mr. Taylor said that they were currently meeting to do so. He said that she brought up a good point about land and their pursuit of land. He said that there were some identified targets, one mentioned was the property of the high school and property in the central part of the County. He said that there was a central process at the County level where they worked in a committee to help identify. He said that that would be a part of land acquisition that the School Board and County would engage in, likely in closed session.

Mr. English asked what the general capacity was for a new elementary school.

Mr. Taylor said that a typical elementary school was going to be around 600-800 students. He said that they advocated for building more cost-effective than that, with more than 900. He said that their target would be designing for somewhere around 960 to accommodate more students under one roof. He said that they were currently in a situation where it would be great to have a 600-student school, but the return on investment was much better for them to build it bigger. He said that they found that they could manage larger elementary schools, so that was the approach at this time.

Mr. English asked what the seat capacity for Hartwood Elementary School was and what the seat capacity for Drew Middle School was.

Ms. Bohmke said that Hartwood was 571 and Drew was 650.

Ms. Vanuch said that it was useful in these work sessions if the Supervisors tried to imagine being in the place of the School Board members. She said that they could not fix past poor planning, so this Board was focused on solution-oriented approaches. She said that they also were faced with asking the School Board to understand the Board's situation and the financial aspects of the CIP they presented. She said there were many needs on their end for building infrastructure and public safety, but they also had a diverse population of incomes in Stafford. She said that Ms. Light had stated there was a $240 average tax for households, but households over $400,000 would see the cost increase significantly.

Ms. Vanuch said that Mr. Taylor had already mentioned that if they focused on one side specifically, so that the Board could focus on anything outside of their budget or any other needs, meant there would be a 6-cent or $240 tax increase on the average price of the home just to move forward with these things this year. She asked what was agreed with, disagreed with, or needed to change. She said that in the past, there had been varying opinions because the Boards were unwilling to sympathize with each other's positions and compromise.

Ms. Vanuch said that they needed to work together on what could be done this year, and if they moved to bond referendum, she would like to put as many things on the referendum as possible so the voters could decide and make the unequivocal statement of what was wanted. She said that that would help them in the future to say what the tax rate needed to be, and it would be very clear and concise to the taxpayers as to what they were getting and what they were not getting with the bond referendum.

Ms. Vanuch said that people sometimes thought that a bond referendum meant free money and did not know that their taxes would go up. She said that people who complained about the property tax bills did not realize that their taxes went up because they voted for the bond referendum for the roads. She said that people must make that conscious choice, and their Board must decide if the real estate tax or personal-property tax must go up to finance the bonds to pay for the schools, which must all be part of the message of the bond referendum. She said that this was one of the first times they were able to discuss the deep issues between the two Boards, but she would like to hear the School Board's thoughts on what on the slide should be changed so they could have a unified approach.

Ms. Allen asked Ms. Light if she could send a presentation of the School Board's list versus the list that was presented so that she could see the difference between the two.

Ms. Light said that it was a 5two-cent increase over the 10 years.

Ms. Vanuch asked what that was on average.

Ms. Allen asked if it was 5.two cents.

Ms. Light said that it was 5two cents.

Ms. Allen asked if that was each year.

Ms. Light said that it was going up somewhere between 0 and 5two cents each year.

Ms. Gary said it was going up by 10 cents each year.

Ms. Light said that this was the increase.

Ms. Allen asked if they were asking for a 10-cent increase.

Ms. Vanuch said that it would be every year for the next 10 years.

Ms. Allen asked what assumptions Ms. Light and the team made for the timeline. She asked if they made sure they were in their debt capacity.

Ms. Light said yes, they were absolutely staying within the debt capacity.

Ms. Allen said that she was interested in the staffing aspect of this, because all of these projects would require additional staffing and would result in increased costs.

Ms. Healy said that they must focus on what was needed now. She said that some of the projects were 10 years from now or within the 10 years, and they had all been involved in the CIP documents, which changed every year. She said that they were asking for a consistent request for Elementary School #18 and Elementary School #19 to be built together because there could be significant financial savings by doing so, followed by the Hartwood rebuild. She said that as she mentioned earlier, Elementary School #18 would provide immediate relief to Hartwood, but they would still need to rebuild Hartwood, and when they did, they would be adding several hundred seats to the capacity. She said that those were the first and most critical needs right now.

Ms. Healy said that they had earlier identified Drew as the number one priority, but after looking at the increased needs within the schools and the status of the elementary schools, they amended the CIP to put the elementary schools first and ahead of Drew. She said that while there was no question that Drew must be rebuilt, the first thing they wanted to talk about was Elementary School #18, Elementary School #19, and the Hartwood rebuild. She said that they had wanted to talk to the Board about substituting Elementary School #18 with the capacity of 964 seats for the Hartwood rebuild.

Ms. Healy said that the Hartwood rebuild was approved by the Board of Supervisors, and she was unsure of the basis, because it was not part of their recommendation, nor was it a recommendation of the TRC. She said that the Board approved it and the School Board was asking for them to substitute a new school to go in the south. She said that there were trailers at Rocky Run and Conway, and the reason they had trailers at Conway was that they were busing children from 17 to Conway. She said that the new school in the south would relieve the overcrowding as well as give immediate relief to Hartwood.

Ms. Gary asked what they were doing in the meantime for Hartwood. She asked what the expense was to fix the septic issues so that they could be continued to be used.

Ms. Healy said that several years ago, they put $750,000 into the septic system at Hartwood, and they were told that it should help them for 10 years, so it was not that they did not want to rebuild Hartwood, but the need was greater to have a new school with more capacity.

Ms. Gary said that she understood. She asked what they were doing to fix the current issues at the school.

Mr. Taylor said that the most recent issues that they had were addressed, fixed, and repaired. He said that as long as they continued to fill that school, it would have pressure. He said that the capacity was limited based on the septic system as well as the walls that surrounded it. He said that it was an aged school that they advocated replacement for. He said that when looking at the number of classrooms that they would be in deficit in a short period of time, it counterbalanced what was really needed. He said that they needed seats first and then needed to address the infrastructure. He said that to Ms. Healy's point about bundling projects, there was cost savings to doing this work, and Elementary School #18, Elementary School #19, and Hartwood having a similar design and construction timeline all lent themselves to additional cost savings.

Ms. Gary said that she trusted that the School Board knew what they were doing with those things based on the previous discussions they had, so she was trying to understand if it was a capacity reduction issue that would help the septic issues not continue to resurface.

Mr. Taylor said that it would help tremendously.

Ms. Gary asked if they would be able to address that with this.

Mr. Taylor said yes.

Ms. Halstead said that they should look at the County as a whole. She said that they had the opportunity to flip things around, and it was good to see that they were willing to take it. She said that the capacity issues for the County were almost at a crisis point because they were struggling to fill in the vacancies they had to provide manageable classroom sizes for their kids. She said that the socio-emotional learning that was lost during Covid-19 was not the only issue, and the higher capacity of the kids in the school affected them. She said that they had taken children who had lost multiple years of major milestones during school and placed twice the amount of them together in one room.

Mr. Halstead said that they could decompress Hartwood Elementary and bring that school to a lifespan of a few years, and if they built Elementary School #18, they could pull kids from Hartwood and Rocky Run to get rid of the trailers. She said that it was a multi-faceted issue and was not only about decompressing Hartwood but was about the fact that they could not provide safe environments for their kids, because there were too many kids.

Mr. Halstead said that there were so many variables impacting the system at this point, and in 10 years, they would still need more schools if they continued to grow at the pace that they were. She said that there were no available seats or spaces to act as classrooms, and for Stafford County in 2022, it was unacceptable. She said that it came out in talking with the community and developing the budget CIP that families wanted Hartwood to rebuild, but people were looking for a manageable school building where everyone could function safely.

Ms. Halstead said that in 10 years, they would have two or three new elementary schools, and the other schools that were 20 or thirty years old would create a bigger equity issue. She said that there was an internal difference in the quality of the newly built schools versus the oldest ones, so they had to consider that they needed to rebuild some of these schools.

Ms. Halstead said that the changes coming in terms of learning environments and what they may need were things that must be considered, and they should look at rebuilding their schools at the life of the building, but more so because times had changed. She said that they had to educate the public that if they were expecting the best out of Stafford County, that came at a cost, which was unfortunate for taxpayers to have to burden, but she knew that the taxpayers appreciated how good the schools were, so they should find it worthwhile to pay the extra amount to have the school system.

Ms. Halstead said that the purpose of a community was to care for their children and help them thrive when they left the community later on. She said that Ms. Allen also made the point that they had to entice teachers to teach in their school system, and a part of that would be the new facilities that were aesthetically pleasing and engaging. She said that there was no dollar being asked for or being spent that was not being used for every taxpayer's benefit.

Ms. Gary said that her point was to understand the dynamics of how this would work. She said that she understood that this accumulated because there was a fear that they would restrict what they could have, but she believed in and trusted that the School Board was trying to do the best thing, and they had to fund much of this and do so quickly. She said that her questions were asked so that she could understand the purpose of the process, but she believed that this must be done.

Ms. Healy said that she appreciated Ms. Gary's questions. She said that Elementary School #19 would provide relief to multiple schools in the central part of the County, and the request for it to be built simultaneously with #18 would significantly help many portions of the County, as well as save millions of dollars due to avoiding inflation.

Ms. Bohmke said that she was a big supporter of the schools, but a large part of her decision-making relied on data. She said that she looked at the packet yesterday to prepare for the meeting. She asked when redistricting was done. She said that it was last year. She said that the numbers on the sheet made it seem as if they had not redistricted. She said that the question they must all ask themselves was if they redistricted the way they should have.

Ms. Bohmke said that unfortunately, they would need to take some of the kids from Drew Middle School and move them to Dixon. She said that Dixon had 819 students with a capacity of 1100, and it was not fair to Drew Middle School. She said that she understood there were children they did not want to move, but she would like to know if it was all fair concern. She said that the same was true when looking at Conway, Hampton Oaks, Hartwood, and Rocky Run. She asked if they had considered spot redistricting or doing more than they had last year so that they did not have to put relocatable children at certain schools.

Mr. Taylor said that that document was one year out of date.

Ms. Bohmke asked why the document was in the materials provided.

Mr. Taylor said that he did not know. He said that the School Board did not supply that document to the Board. He said that Dixon-Smith had room for Drew redistricting, and they did redistrict students from Drew to Dixon-Smith and would have to do so again in the near future. He said that to keep operations at Drew where they were still able to provide a middle school program because it was such a small school, they did not want to go much below 600, so their operating at a high level of capacity made sense programmatically. He said that at the elementary level, they had a few schools with capacity, one of them being Rock Hill Elementary School. He said that there were an additional 30 seats at Margaret Brent, but no others.

Mr. Taylor said that they had reached the point where there were no more schools to redistrict to other than those two. He said that Margaret Brent had a very large attendance zone. He said that it was cost-prohibitive to extend that attendance zone much larger, because it was the size of a high school attendance zone in terms of its transportation network and how wide it was. He said that there were some bus routes that went over one hour.

Mr. Taylor said that Widewater was a bit out of the way, but it was also filling up, so they were not looking at just one year's time horizon, but also were looking at the next three years, and if they redistricted students, the last thing they wanted to do was to redistrict them to a place where they would either have to redistrict again or did so to a place where they knew they would have to add trailers. He said that they were at that point where the few schools that they had were limited in terms of capacity, not by the level of redistricting that they needed to do such as Park Ridge, because they were running out of space to redistrict them to.

Ms. Bohmke apologized for asking that question because the data she was referring to was obviously inaccurate. She asked if Mr. Taylor and Mr. Vosburg have conversations to have accurate information presented. She said that it appeared that there were 42 seats in the entire County, and if that was the case, she now understood the urgency of the issue, because that was not the picture shown in front of her. She said that anyone who looked at these materials was receiving the same information she had.

Mr. Taylor said that they had more than 42 seats, but the issue was that they were not in the right spot where it was convenient for them to do something about it. He said that they could absolutely redistrict people to Ferry Farm and to Rock Hill but would cross over and pass four different schools to do so.

Ms. Bohmke said that had been done in years past with Gayle Middle School. She said that Grafton Village did not have many children.

Mr. Taylor said that Grafton Village was full. He said that it may not be worth doing, and to think about it from the operating expense to consider in terms of transportation and continuity of services, it may not be worth it to aggravate constituents and have them go over four school zones to a different school when there were some logical things to be done, such as construct schools, to alleviate the growth. He said that they had foreseen this coming, and the time had come to make decisions.

Ms. Yeung said that they had to leave capacity for the growth of upcoming years, and they would not get there if they continued to redistrict children to move them to empty seats. She said that besides the redistricting upsetting parents, it was important for them to do what was necessary for Stafford County. She said that Stafford County should be thought of as a whole, and that future growth was a key component of how to determine capacity of schools.

Mr. Taylor said that at a cost of less than $1 per day for taxpayers, he believed there were many constituents who would agree with Ms. Yeung.

Ms. Vanuch said that they could all comment about how they needed to build schools. She said that they should look at the document that they had. She said that Ms. Healy mentioned moving up Elementary Schools #18 and #19. She said that what would be helpful to her would be if the School Board members could propose a tax rate that they felt was comfortable for the community and what it would look like. She said that the staff had come up with a 6-cent tax rate and a list of possible projects.

Ms. Vanuch said that they had to be able to agree to buy into a tax increase or authorize a bond referendum to provide a 6-cent tax increase, but they were still not aligned on what that would look like, because their ideas may end up being a 1two-cent tax increase. She said that the best use of their time could be spent looking at what was important to the School Board and how that impacted the tax rate and totality so that they could move forward. She asked if they would move something down to offset the tax increase or if the tax rate should be increased.

Ms. Healy said that the first request was to substitute Elementary School #18 for the Hartwood rebuild.

Ms. Vanuch asked how that would look.

Ms. Healy asked what the cost difference was between the Hartwood rebuild and Elementary School #18.

Mr. Fulmer said that they were virtually the same.

Ms. Healy said that it would not cost the County much at all for that request.

Ms. Vanuch asked if that was currently approved in the CIP, because it was not listed.

Ms. Light said that Hartwood was approved starting in FY23.

Ms. Healy said that that was approved today, and that would work for the School Board, because they were already looking at a design and at land, and they would like to begin construction on Elementary School #18, but they required the Board of Supervisors' approval because they had approved Hartwood on their own. She said that the second request was Elementary School #19. She said that Elementary School #18 was $58.8M, which was in the range because it was in FY24.

Ms. Healy said that that figure was accurate and that they would like to build Elementary School #19 at the same time as #18, and she assumed it would be no more than $58.8M, because they assumed they would save millions of dollars by doing this simultaneously. She said that they were not asking for the Drew Middle School replacement yet, but were asking for it after Elementary School #18 and Elementary School #19, which they would like to begin next year, and then follow them with the Hartwood replacement.

Ms. Allen asked if they wanted to replace them and then do Drew.

Ms. Healy said yes. She said that Drew was originally the number one priority, but they realized that the strain and demand on the schools could not survive unless they got some relief. She said that they were not asking for the $90M for Drew, but the $58.8M times two, with an expected reduction.

Ms. Vanuch asked where Drew would move to.

Ms. Healy said that there had been no decisions made yet, but they had discussed building the new Rising Star on the Drew campus and moving Drew to the Rising Star campus.

Mr. Taylor said that they would group the projects.

Mr. English asked if it was similar to what was done for Stafford High School.

Mr. Taylor said yes.

Ms. Vanuch said she was wondering how the order would look in the 10-year CIP.

Mr. Taylor said that the School Board was advocating for grouping projects to meet the capacity needs and to make logical construction. He said that #18 and #19 would be together, followed by the similar project of Hartwood, then Drew and Rising Star as the top priorities in terms of school construction would allow them to save resources.

Ms. Allen asked what fiscal year they were trying to get this done in.

[audio cuts 1:11:40 – 1:17:18]

Mr. English asked where the land was for Elementary Schools #18 and #19 and for Hartwood.

Mr. Taylor said that they would be happy to discuss it in closed session.

Ms. Vanuch asked if they could have a joint closed session on December 13.

Ms. Healy said that they had reached consensus that Elementary School #18 would be in the south, because that was where the trailers were currently and where relief was needed. She said that Elementary School #19 would be located somewhere in the central corridor to provide relief for Stafford L.

Mr. English asked where Hartwood would be located.

Ms. Healy said that she did not recall having a specific discussion, but if they rebuilt Hartwood, it would have to be somewhere in the vicinity of Hartwood, because the intent would be to keep the crux of the population together, similar to when they rebuilt Moncure near the old Moncure. She said that with Moncure, they did not have money for the land, but the Supervisors purchased the land, and they entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Supervisors that the land would be conveyed to the School Board after the school was built, and they would surplus the old

Moncure to the County. She said that they had worked together in the past to identify and acquire the land, and it did not matter to that extent as to whose name the land was in, so long as by the time the school was opened, the title to the property was in the school's name.

Ms. Gary said that it was important in the words that they used. She said that she did not think it was her job to sell anything to her constituents and that she was there to represent them, and she had heard that the schools were not the way that they needed to be. She said that there were a plethora of issues across the County, and even those who were more fiscally conservative said that they did not mind a tax increase so long as they knew the money was being used for the right reasons.

Ms. Gary said that it was past time that they took care of their children who were not being taken care of like they should be. She said that she encouraged her colleagues who perhaps doubted that their constituents were in favor of using increases to deal with this issue to please speak with more of them. She said that this impacted their children's personal lives, and mental health continued to be brought up as an issue for both adults and children.

Ms. Guy said that she came to Stafford because the schools were great at the time, but they could no longer say that. She said that they had great educators and students, but the schools were not nice. She said that much of the community conflated Covid-19 issues and learning loss, while they had been experiencing a learning loss in Stafford for a decade in SOL scores by one or two points. She said that being in overcrowded classrooms brought down test scores and gave a higher rate of discipline problems, which was what they were currently seeing. She said that the kids did not even realize how angry they were due to the situation, and the educators had to deal with being crammed in as well.

Ms. Guy said that she heard discussion of the trailers at the schools all the time because she was on the School Board, and she was tired of hearing about it because those were the best they could do right now. She said that the educators did not like the trailers either due to safety concerns for the kids. She said that when a child had to use the restroom, someone had to be there to open and close the door to the school, and if the door was left open, they did not know who was coming into the schools.

Ms. Guy said that when someone said she would not sell it to her constituents either, but she would lead them and explain to them why this was important and why they needed to support it. She said that for the School Board, they were trying to keep a concise message and say the same thing despite their differences. She said that they could acknowledge what they wish had happened while still explaining what they were going to do, which would help their constituents tremendously.

Ms. Chase said that they would have trailers at Falmouth and Park Ridge next year, and likely at Stafford Elementary as well. She said that she had given up some pretty big wants, such as Drew being rebuilt. She said that they had \$4.5M to replace the HVAC system at Drew, but it would cost \$20M to replace the HVAC system at Drew. She said that they were told that they could no longer get parts to fix things at Drew because they were so old. She said that it was unfair to the children who attended Drew to attend under the situation that they were in, so she hoped that they understood what the School Board had given already.

Ms. Warner said that she appreciated Ms. Vanuch's concern about voicing wants and needs. She said that she appreciated the fact that this would increase the taxes and understood this as a taxpayer. She said that she also appreciated that she was looking at schools that were over capacity and in places where they had space, the space could not necessarily be utilized, because there was a transportation problem in Stafford, and trying to move students from one area of the County to another produced logistical problems that sometimes meant students would ride on the bus for an hour or longer and was not practical. She said that they had looked at their CIP very thoughtfully, had relied on Mr. White's assessments, and had triaged and tried to prioritize.

Ms. Warner said that they had decided as a Board that the key priorities were to get seats and capacity and to alleviate the overcrowding in the southern section to take pressure off of Falmouth, Rocky Run, Conway, and Hartwood. She said that they needed to alleviate the overcrowding on the Courthouse Road section and central section, along with the needed replacements of Hartwood, Drew, and Rising Star. She said that Rising Star was in pretty horrible condition for where they housed some of their youngest and most vulnerable students. She said that the School Board had been thoughtful and that they had all made concessions to prioritize things.

Ms. Warner said that they had to tread a fine line with Drew Middle School, because if capacity was reduced too much, they could not offer all the programs to those middle school students, so they were constantly shuffling students to ensure their academic needs were being met. She said that people had been saying for years that they needed more schools, and it now had reached a crescendo. She said that they had not had a new elementary school for capacity since 2006, had not built a new middle school for capacity since they built Shirley Heim in 2009, and now all those issues were coming home to roost. She said that the School Board had looked carefully at what was needed today to take the pressure off so they could provide the school infrastructure that the students needed.

Ms. Halstead said that they needed to all be more actively involved in engaging with constituents about the conversations being had and so the information was present for them and not only centered around the tax increase, but about the redistricting and other facts. She said that the issue with poor school infrastructure was present across the country and not only in Stafford County.

She said that they had the people in place to make those changes and adjustments, but they should stay open-minded as to what that meant.

Ms. Halstead said that if it meant having a bond referendum and its potential impacts, that should be part of the everyday conversation they were having and not waiting for meetings but finding more ways to get more information out to the public. She said that the time she had spent at the Parks and Rec Center each week with her daughter showed her some of the issues with the messaging to the public, and it was easy to create division over a tax increase that way, but it would be better for both prospective residents of Stafford to learn and for the current residents to get the most pertinent information.

Ms. Vanuch asked Ms. Light if she had done the math.

Ms. Light said that she was relying on Mr. Taylor's math. She said that to replace Elementary School #19 and Hartwood in that order was negligible in cost, and to do #19, Hartwood, Drew, and Rising, they were looking at $330,000.

Mr. Fulmer said that the years they opened also influenced the cost, so by bumping the timeline up, they would save $10M-$20M by doing them earlier.

Ms. Vanuch said that she thought that they were finding a number of how it would change.

Mr. Fulmer said that it would take more time.

Ms. Vanuch said that a follow-up should include circulation to both Boards how that changed this slide. She said that she assumed that if they wanted to stay with the same $439.5M cost over 10 years, there would be things on the slide that would change to bump up the other items. She said that the next step after review by the Boards, at their next meeting in March, they would be through at least one-third of the budget and would have a better idea of the tax rate based on the other budget costs, and there should be some Board direction on all these items for a bond referendum and what that would look like in messaging and what tax it came off of.

Ms. Guy asked if the bond referendum did not pass and they still required the seats, what they would do as Boards to address it.

Ms. Vanuch said that they would have to address it after that because the community had given them guidance that they did not want to use the tax increase to build the schools, and they then had to figure out how to add the seats without doing what the community did not want.

Ms. Allen said that she would like for Ms. McClendon to give a timeline for what must be done to get the bond referendum ready, because there was a tight timeline for that. She asked if there needed to be anything ready before April.

Ms. McClendon said that the only thing that was required by state code was that the circuit court had to order a special election for the referendum 81 days before the election, and she recommended the Board make their decision no later than the end of July to allow the circuit court time of two or three weeks to put the referendum in place. She said that beyond that, once the circuit court gave the order, they would work with Communications to ensure the communications of the bond referendum went out, because their state code required that with regards of what had to be included in that information.

Ms. Allen asked if the two Boards would work on the language together or if the Board would create the language of the referendum.

Ms. Vanuch said that the Board would determine the language of the bond referendum. She said that when they did the bond referendum for the roads, the language mentioned specific roads, so she was sure this Board would say the high-level projects and would not describe details. She said that outside of the bond referendum language itself, they would work with both Communications teams to explain what specifically was happening, what the timeline was, and what the offset impact was to the taxpayer. She said that they did not do a very good job of that in 2019, and the Board fought over how it would be paid for because they did not identify it first, and when people realized it was their personal property taxes, they were resistant to it. She said that this helped hold the Board responsible in the following years.

Ms. Allen said that they should not wait for that result but have a plan B ready because even if the public told them no, they still had to build facilities for children. She said that they had to have simultaneous plans in some way.

Ms. Vanuch said that some people may not support the bond referendum because they were not stakeholders in the schools but might support a plan that did not include taxpayer involvement, so they should be cognizant of what that looked like.

Ms. Yeung said that they should devise a plan of having different types of messaging in different areas.

Ms. Vanuch said that they should stick with what the School Board was asking for.

Ms. Allen said that the messaging could identify that #18 was going near Hartwood.

Ms. Vanuch said that they had to do that.

Ms. Yeung said that she was unsure if that had always been done in the past.

Ms. Bohmke said that it was important to tell voters in a bond issue exactly where the money would be spent, because the investors that were purchasing those bonds had expectations. She said that they as a Board could have fire stations and the schools altogether, but if there were certain things that they wanted to use for a fire levy, it would be a separate issue and would not be the same, so voters would vote on two separate things. She said that the Board had not yet discussed it, but they may not want to do a fire levy tax at the same time as a general obligation bond that might include fire stations and schools.

Ms. Bohmke said that a large part of the transportation bond was creating a large map of the County and highlighting all the roads they wanted to improve to ensure that everyone in the County was getting something that they felt made it worth it. She said that as it related to education, the number one thing they had to convince voters that did not have children in school anymore was that their home value would continue to be maintained if they paid for schools, and they had to pay it forward.

Ms. Bohmke said that it was all in the messaging, and whatever consultant they hired to help with this was of paramount importance, because if the message was not told correctly, it was going to fail. She said that Spotsylvania had had two or three general obligation bonds over the years, and they all passed. She said that the swimming pool this year had not passed and they had a lot of things on.

Ms. Healy said that she wanted to go back to the Hartwood rebuild issue. She asked Ms. Vanuch if they had approved moving forward with the Hartwood rebuild. She said that they would continue to request for that to be substituted for Elementary School #18, which would give a few more hundred seats than Hartwood, but they desperately needed Elementary School #18, and it had nothing to do with the bond referendum. She said that if they did not get their approval, they could not move forward with #18.

Ms. Vanuch asked Ms. Light if the Hartwood rebuild was on the CIP for FY23 or FY24.

Ms. Light said that it began in FY23.

Ms. Vanuch said that they were currently in that fiscal year. She said that the Board would have to take an action to change the CIP and asked if they would require a public hearing.

Ms. Light said that the Board was allowed to change the direction of the CIP. She said that because they had a public hearing on BPSA, they would have to work with the County Attorney to determine how to have a new public hearing before they amended the bond borrow.

Ms. Vanuch asked if anyone on the Board had an issue with Ms. Light following up on this issue with the Board under New Business for the Board meeting next Tuesday, December 13.

Ms. Healy said that they would like to be ready to look at contractors for the school once they knew that Elementary School #18 could be built.

Ms. Vanuch asked if a closed session could be held with the schools about the location.

Ms. Healy said that the School Board would make itself available.

Ms. Vanuch asked if that was the direction they would like to go in.

Ms. Gary said yes.

Ms. Yeung said yes.

Mr. English said no.

Ms. Allen said yes.

Ms. Vanuch asked if it could be added as new business to see what they had to do.

[1:46:47 -1:48:04 audio cuts]

Ms. Vanuch said that because this was all now before the Board, anything received by one Board member would be received by all Board members.

Ms. Healy said that the Superintendent would send it to the County Administrator.

Ms. Gary said that sometimes it was fiscally conservative to raise taxes because of things like this. She said that this was a discussion that she had been having with a lot of people.

Ms. Healy said that they could list the schools that Elementary School #18 and #19 would relieve.

Mr. Taylor said that six of the seven magisterial districts would be positively impacted by the construction of Elementary Schools #18 and #19, and a sixth would be positively impacted indirectly. He said that the one district that would not be impacted by these would be the Rock Hill District.

Ms. Sigmund said that she disagreed with that. She said that when they had to redistrict, they pushed west, and looking at the capacity issues in Aquia and Garrisonville meant that they would push west, and Rock Hill would end up with trailers as well, so it would indirectly impact every school.

Ms. Yeung asked for clarification about what five districts would be impacted.

Mr. Taylor said that five districts would be impacted with one additional district being indirectly impacted.

Ms. Guy asked if they should meet more than twice a year.

Ms. Vanuch said that the School Board three-on-three meeting was meant to have this sort of information brought forward to discuss, and then the respective Boards were meant to discuss that and bring it back. She said that they had talked about having them bi-monthly or quarterly.

Ms. Guy said that perhaps at the three-on-three meetings, they could get updated enrollment.

Ms. Vanuch said that those meetings would be beneficial if they talked about things like they did today. She said that sometimes meetings were canceled because items were added to the agenda for political reasons and they did not want to participate. She said that at the last meeting, they talked about attendance zones, growth in the County, proffer changes, and the schools would help them find where kids were actually located with the school data and the developer data, and what must be changed. She said that data was now available to help change fees.

Ms. Healy said that the School Board could update the documents given at the meeting today. She said that while the documents prepared were official, they were outdated, and the Superintendent could update that.

Ms. Vanuch said that she appreciated that and said that they needed the most accurate information.

Ms. Yeung said that during budget season, there was a Superintendent budget and Chair budget, and it confused her. She asked if there would only be one budget.

Ms. Healy said that the state law required the Superintendent to provide the Superintendent's proposed budget, and the School Board considered that budget and adopted a budget. She said that they could not change that legal requirement, but she agreed that last year there was confusion because people were talking about the Superintendent's budget as if it were the School Board's budget, but this was not true until the School Board held public hearings and adopted their own budget.

Ms. Guy said that once the School Board budget was passed, the Superintendent's budget was no longer relevant.

Ms. Bohmke said that Mr. Coen had just texted her and asked if they should have a subcommittee of three or two members from each Board as it related to preparing items for a bond issue. She said that they could discuss that item at a later time.

Ms. Vanuch said that the School Board three-on-three was the best place to do that.

ADJOURNMENT

At 6:03 p.m., Chairman Vanuch adjourned the December 6, 2022 Joint Board of Supervisors and School Board Work Session.

Randal E. Vosburg
County Administrator

Crystal Vanuch
Board Chairman