JOINT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AND SCHOOL BOARD
WORK SESSION
STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA
MINUTES
JANUARY 4, 2024

CALL TO ORDER – A joint work session of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors and the Stafford County School Board was called to order by Meg Bohmke, Chairman, at 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 4, 2024 in Conference Room ABC, George L. Gordon, Jr. Government Center, 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford, VA.

ROLL CALL – The following members were present: Meg Bohmke, Chairman; Tinesha Allen, Vice Chairman; Deuntay T. Diggs; Darrell E. English; Monica L. Gary; Crystal L. Vanuch; Dr. Pamela Yeung

Also, in attendance were Randal E. Vosburg, County Administrator; Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney; Cheryl Giles, Deputy Clerk; various staff members; and other interested parties.

WORK SESSION AGENDA ITEMS

FY25-FY34 SCHOOLS CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN (CIP)

Ms. Randall said that the Stafford County School Board was grateful for the opportunity to meet with the Board of Supervisors today and discuss their approved Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) submitted in October 2023. She said that she was proud of everyone's hard work in creating this document on behalf of the schools. She said that on Wednesday, they celebrated a milestone as many of the Supervisors joined their School Board members at the new site for High School 6.

Ms. Randall said that she was part of the CIP committee with Ms. Bohmke when they first discussed the idea in 2010. She said that the School Board aimed to implement various changes and improvements, which she said made everyone feel that these matters were important. She said that they listened attentively as staff discussed plans for the new high school, so they were looking forward to it very much.

Ms. Randall said that last fall, they came together to address an issue they had been discussing, which was integrating Hartwood and expediting Elementary Schools 18 and 19. She said that they engaged in a thorough discussion about it, and the decision to move forward with this plan was made after considering priorities. She said that this collaboration between the two Boards made the plan possible. She said that they listened to their needs and concerns regarding growth challenges facing their County. She said that Elementary School 18 and Elementary School 19 were identified as necessary steps toward addressing some of these growth challenges.

Ms. Randall said that she commended the work of both Boards coming together, as when she joined the Board four years ago, there were no schools in the CIP to be built, but now they had three schools coming into play, which was a significant achievement to progress from zero to three and to secure a CIP change from what was initially proposed to what they were requesting. She said that the Supervisors listened and collaborated with them, as well as the County, benefiting their students, families, and community. She said that she believed there should be a substantial thank you from the School Board's side for this joint effort between two Boards.

Ms. Randall said that they had also mentioned needing rebuilds for Drew, Rising Star, and Hartwood. She said that for all three of these projects were a priority for both Boards, and the Supervisors accepted the importance and made it a priority to make these three projects the next to happen. She said that their current plan had all openings occurring by 2028. She said that there were numerous needs within the County, so they must request what was required. She said that they were putting forth their requests, open to discussion regarding the School Board's timeline versus the Supervisors' timeline.

Ms. Randall said that this evening, other Board members would address their needs for the three rebuilds and provide updates on the current situations. She said that she would like to invite all of them to share their knowledge and insights based on their previous experiences with these projects. She said that they would be happy to host a visit to Drew, Rising Star, and Hartwood in their current state to better understand the challenges affecting learning.

Ms. Randall said that when she was working on the rebuilding of Stafford High School, Ms. Bohmke informed her that she needed to provide reasons for why they would need to rebuild Stafford High School. She said that during this time, they visited both Mountain View, the newest school, and Stafford High School. She said that they ensured equal time at each location, examining department by department. She said that during their visit, it became evident that students at Stafford faced challenges in obtaining the same educational opportunities as those in other high schools.

Ms. Randall said that in the science department, they had more resources than other high schools. She said that she taught biology, environmental science, and marine science at Brooke Point, and she could run 24 microscopes in her room. She said that if they ran four at Stafford High School, it would cause electricity to fail for three classrooms. She said that there were indeed challenges affecting educational opportunities for thousands of students. She said that it was necessary to rebuild that school. She said that as previously mentioned, each Board member will discuss other schools and the challenges impacting educational opportunities for children in those buildings.

Ms. Healy said that they had compiled a list of the projects and one thing they requested from the superintendent was to include the date when these projects initially appeared in the School Board's CIP. She said that it should be noted that the three priorities they had, as Ms. Randall mentioned, were the rebuilding of Drew Middle School, replacing Rising Star, and the Hartwood Elementary rebuild, and all first appeared on the school's CIP in FY07. She said this was approximately 18 years ago, and they were now working on FY25.

Ms. Healy said that in the past, schools were built with the intention of lasting for a long time. She said that however, as they aged, maintaining them became increasingly challenging. She said that at some point, it cost more to maintain an older building than it did to rebuild it from scratch, and this was the situation they currently faced with both Drew and Rising Star schools. She said that Drew was constructed over 60 years ago. She said that it had been a great school.

Ms. Healy said that there was once a superintendent who proposed closing Drew Middle School after the construction of Dixon-Smith and Shirley Heim. She said that the public and staff advocated for its preservation, highlighting its family atmosphere. She said that Ms. Bohmke was familiar with Drew due to constituents attending the school and they considered it very special. She said that the current environment was not acceptable, and there were limitations to what could be done. She said that rebuilding Drew was necessary.

Ms. Healy said that regarding Rising Star, it was in the same condition. She said that Rising Star served their smallest and most vulnerable students, performing vital work for their community. She said that Drew had been a great institution, but it required maintenance and eventual rebuilding. She said that continually applying Band-Aids was not an effective solution as they were no longer sticking, leading to increased costs. She said that this situation was not financially beneficial for the County.

Ms. Healy said that as a result, Drew had become their top priority in terms of construction. She said that they had requested that it be replaced by August 2028; however, the approved County timing was 2030. She said that their goal was to collaborate with the Supervisors and explore ways to expedite this process, as rebuilding Drew would prove economically advantageous. She said that it had been mentioned that they had been required to continuously invest funds into repairs that were ultimately futile since they planned to demolish the school.

Ms. Healy said that it was unnecessary for her to emphasize Hartwood as Mr. English had already discussed this topic extensively. She said that he was well aware of the necessity to replace Hartwood. She said that Hartwood would prove advantageous for them in multiple ways. She said that firstly, they would have access to County water and septic systems instead of relying on a well.

Ms. Healy said that additional seats would be available, which would help accommodate their growing student population. She said that even with Elementary Schools 18 and 19, they were still struggling to fit all students comfortably. She said that they appreciated the approval of the replacement but wanted to discuss the timing and explore potential options further. She said that when they constructed Mountain View and Brent, she believed they employed the PPEA, which was a different method of financing.

Ms. Healy said that she was not suggesting this for their current project, but if there were alternative funding sources or ways to achieve these goals within budget requirements, the School Board would be pleased to explore them. She said that it was significant that the Board as a whole had consistently agreed on this priority order, highlighting that these projects needed to be completed within specified time frames. She said that this decision had not been made recently; rather, it had been over 18 years since these projects had been on the list. She said that after such an extended period, they were no longer functioning effectively. She said it was unfair to the students, staff, and all their constituents.

Dr. Chase said that in June of 2022, the School Board approved using $3.8 million in bond funds to replace Drew's aging HVAC system. She said that in September of 2022, Drew's fire alarms unexpectedly went off. She said that when she asked what had caused this, there was no definitive answer. She said that she was informed that in older buildings, the electrical system can sometimes cause such occurrences. She said that as a result, she called a special meeting to discuss altering the CIP and moving Drew up on the list.

Dr. Chase said that at that time, it was not the will of the Board to do so; instead, they agreed to bundle Elementary Schools 18 and 19 as they would result in substantial construction savings. She said that in December of 2022, they were informed that the cost to replace Drew's HVAC would be around $20 million. She said that based on staff recommendations, the Board voted to provide temporary generators for Drew's HVAC system at a cost of $760,000 and redistribute the remaining $3 million in bond funds to projects at other schools.

Dr. Chase said that for example, repairs to the middle school tracks at A.G. Wright, Gayle, and Rodney Thompson, as well as improvements to the auditorium at North Stafford High School. She said that in May of 2023, a sewer pipe at Drew broke, causing sewage to enter the stormwater drains unexpectedly. She said that this unbudgeted repair cost $100,000. She said that the repairs involved replacing only one pipe, so they should not be surprised if more pipes fail in the coming years.

Dr. Chase said that at their October meeting, they approved the use of $218,000 in unbudgeted funds due to the failure of a compressor at Drew. She said that if left unfixed, parts of the building would have been without heating or air conditioning. She said that finally, last month, they were informed that the intercom system at Drew had failed. She said that the temporary solution was walkie-talkies. She said that it had been reported that they may have been fixed, but the most recent update she received was that they were working to obtain parts to repair the system.

Dr. Chase said that if Drew experienced a catastrophic failure and needed to close temporarily, the students currently attending Drew would be relocated by being distributed among Dixon, Smith, and Gayle schools. She said that these institutions had a capacity of 1,100 each, so this would result in each school being over their capacity by 300 students. She said that she could guarantee everyone that residents from Falmouth, Hartwood, and George Washington Districts would be displeased if this occurred.

Dr. Chase said that the manner in which they allocated their tax dollars reflected their priorities. She said that the message conveyed when funds were diverted to auditoriums at other schools while students at Drew could not enroll in band due to insufficient space was concerning. She said that the reallocation of bond funds to athletic tracks at other middle schools while students and staff at Drew worried about a failing HVAC system was also a matter of concern. She said that she was concerned about using funds for turf fields while students and staff at Drew had to endure cockroach infestations due to crumbling sewer pipes.

Dr. Chase said that she was beyond frustrated that they chose to postpone the construction of Drew when informed that building Elementary Schools 18 and 19 simultaneously would save money. She said that these two schools were projected to cost $37 million more than the inflation-adjusted estimates presented last year, and now staff was projecting an additional $26 million in costs. She stated that she could not argue in good faith that the latest proposal of bundling Drew, Rising Star, and Hartwood together would save money. She said that all she could do was request that funds for the replacement of Drew Middle School be found as soon as possible.

Dr. Warner said that she would discuss Rising Star, a facility built in 1937. She said that during every rainfall, the entryway flooded. She said that the flushing of pipes and water lines every 30 days to prevent lead accumulation in the water supply ensured its safety for the children. She said that the building housed their youngest and most vulnerable learners.

Dr. Warner said that although early childhood education may not be a legal requirement and programs such as Head Start and VPI were voluntary, investing in early childhood education yielded significant returns, with every dollar spent generating between $4 and $16 in community benefits. She said that these investments positively impacted children's cognitive and social-emotional development, preparing them for future educational opportunities and professional careers.

Dr. Warner said that study after study had demonstrated that these programs were beneficial, as they represented one of the most effective uses of community funds. She said that if they were to sacrifice these positions, there would be a risk of losing both federal and state funding, which could not be easily regained. She said that this situation would also prove disruptive for their community. She said that families depended on early childhood education through VPI and Head Start programs, as well as the growing population of special education students. She said that the capacity at both Rising Star and North Star was already fully utilized.

Dr. Warner said that Rising Star faced a number of challenges due to its age, such as managing the discharge of students in the afternoon when three rows of buses were present, which could be quite nerve-racking for staff members as they attempted to guide several hundred students onto the correct buses and navigate them through the rows of idling vehicles. She said that the current environment was not optimal for student learning. She said that at North Star, only students living north of 610 could attend North Star, which resulted in many three- and four-year-olds spending an hour and a half on a bus traveling all the way down to Rising Star due to insufficient capacity.

Dr. Warner said that when North Star opened in 2019, the original proposal included an expansion to add classrooms. She said that however, now modular units must be added to accommodate the growth that the County has experienced. She said that the students are already present; thus, they need to find a suitable location for them without sacrificing existing programs, as they provide a net benefit to the community. She said that these programs contributed not only to preparing students but also to developing social and economic aspects of their community. She said that early childhood education was crucial, as it benefited not just the students but also their families.

Dr. Warner said that Rising Star's replacement could coincide nicely with Drew's because they would like to swap the locations of these two facilities. She said that this would place Rising Star at the site where the old Drew was, which would also be a better location due to the availability of ancillary services provided there. She said that Child Find, McKinney-Vento, and other social services are handled at the Melchers facility now. She said that swapping locations would facilitate and utilize the land that they already have.

Dr. Warner said that Drew's building required replacement because it faced various problems, such as cockroach infestations and aging HVAC systems. She said that the latter issue involves constant struggle due to the need for individual units with old components, making it challenging to find parts and repair them when necessary. She said that this was a health and safety risk for their students. She said that she realized that the County had multiple needs beyond what schools required. She said that these needs included roads, transportation, public safety, fire, and rescue services.

Dr. Warner said that there had been a gap in investments made in new construction. She said that Shirley Heim was built in 2009 as the last school built for actual capacity. She said that it had been beneficial to add High School 6 and Elementary Schools 18 and 19, which they worked diligently to ensure were on the same timeline due to space constraints and cost savings. She said that she hoped by moving these timelines up to better accommodate their needs, the long-term benefit to the community would be evident. She said that she would provide all Supervisors with copies of the annual report on early childhood education services.

Ms. Halstead thanked Mr. English for his support in advocating for Hartwood Elementary. She said that his firsthand experience with the school's condition and understanding of its situation made it easier for her to advocate on behalf of the school. She said that Hartwood Elementary represented what the County once was, which was a quaint, off-the-beaten-path location between D.C. and Fredericksburg. She said that this image no longer accurately reflected their current reality. She said that when people chose their forever home locations, they primarily based their decision on school rating systems, especially if they had children.

Ms. Halstead said that they would not consider a school system that did not rank or was ranked 111 out of 132 Districts in the state. She said that this situation did not bode well for them, particularly as the housing market rose in price. She said that they would be looking to tie their house purchases into justifying them with the local school system. She said that she believed that they were running out of time to justify selling homes at the rate that Stafford could, given their school system remained in a steady decline. She said that this decline was evident in teacher budgets and staffing situations.

Ms. Halstead said she wanted to discuss what factors she considered when Mr. White provided them with information. She said that when she first joined the School Board, the cost to replace Hartwood Elementary was approximately $55 million. She said that a couple of weeks ago, they were presented with a new estimate of $80-88 million if they proceeded now or had everything in place in a row. She said that the cost of inaction and pushing things down the road was costing taxpayers a significant amount of money. She said that they should not stop the schools from being built or repaired either since they could not stop the housing development from occurring.

Ms. Halstead said that Westlake's school system would undoubtedly surpass theirs, given the numbers of what they would bring and the current state of affairs in Stafford County. She said that one should take a day to visit the schools, particularly those being discussed. She said that one should spend the day observing the situation. She said that the supplies were located in the hallway, while the classrooms could be found in the supply closet.

Ms. Halstead said that teachers faced challenges every day as they navigated around obstacles, hoping that nothing fell on a child's head or caused them to trip. She said that this was an accident waiting to happen and a lawsuit that they would eventually have to confront one day. She said that it was their responsibility. She said that these discussions had been ongoing since she arrived, so there was no more plausible deniability for anyone involved. She said that it was time to fix the school buildings.

Ms. Halstead said that regarding the current state of school buildings, provided was a breakdown of the County's active residential development data, which revealed that there were 24 subdivisions with 2,266 vacant lots in the Hartwood District. She said that this area constituted approximately 39% of total vacant subdivision lots Countywide. She said that the anticipated student yield from these vacant lots was 508 elementary students, 287 middle school students, and 440 high schoolers, for a grand total of 1,235 students.

Ms. Halstead said that she was unsure where they would place the children without providing them with a quality education. She said that with proffered land, they seemed overly enthusiastic about it from their builder friends. She said that recent history had demonstrated that not all proffers for land were above board, and not all land was a suitable site to accommodate the specific needs of a school building. She asked who ensured that they do not end up with unbuildable land or vacant swamp land, which could cost them more money to retrofit or leave them with an unusable site.

Ms. Halstead said that they should be cautious in their approach to ensure proper placement and allocation of resources for these students. She said that a lot of time and energy went into these numbers, and they were as finite as they could possibly be. She said that every single solitary one of those numbers should mean something to them other than a spreadsheet number. She said that these were kids that were not experiencing education the way they should. She said that they were not learning to read, not learning mathematics, and their behavioral issues were impacting everything that they did on a daily basis. She said that it was categorically unfair to these children.

Ms. Halstead said that regarding Hartwood, they were definitely desperate for their replacement school, although they were super grateful for elementary school 18. She said that staff estimated the total square footage for that school to be approximately 128,000, providing around 519 seats. She said that they were considering adding a bus parking lot over there to help accommodate future growth and additional burdens.

Ms. Halstead said they were hesitant to request specific items to be included in the budget, so they removed them and asked for them independently. She said that this approach transformed an $8 million project into a $15 million one in four years. She said that they must carefully examine making the economics work and avoid having to piecemeal every single component due to its high cost at the end of the day.

Ms. Guy said that previously Ms. Halstead briefly discussed this topic. She said that owning both properties for their site selection offered several benefits. She said that they believed they could achieve some cost savings, which would always be appreciated. She said that the timing of this decision also allowed them to get students back in classes more quickly by facilitating a swap with the schools.

Ms. Guy said that the process could be streamlined and synchronized, minimizing disruption for students and staff. She said that it was not just an efficient plan; it was a strategic one as well. She said that regarding proffer sites, she may not fully understand their scope, but when they were identified for them, she requested that someone considered any potential easement issues on the site.

Ms. Guy said that the selected sites must be buildable. She said that if they obtained proffered land, they needed to consider how much it would cost them to construct on it. She said that these site selections were fantastic because they already had them without having to pay outright for them. She said that she aimed to be transparent with everyone. She said that her fellow Board member did not believe there would be cost savings in doing both tasks, but she thought there would be. She said that they would receive receipts so that they could verify the costs.

Ms. Randall said that one of the things Ms. Guy had alluded to was that when they requested a timeline in Dr. Chase's and Dr. Warner's discussions regarding Drew and Melchers, having those two properties allowed them to switch. She said that however, constructing the schools simultaneously would be crucial because they would be transforming the Drew property into Rising Star while also using the Rising Star property to create a new Drew. She said that to ensure success with this, these projects needed to be coordinated. She said that their final topic would involve Ms. Siegmund discussing the 3R list, which was now part of the CIP and had $162,315,000 worth of projects, of which $78,940,215 were unfunded.

Ms. Siegmund said that she would be discussing maintenance of their existing properties. She said that in Stafford County alone, they had billions of dollars' worth of real estate that included school buildings and facilities. She said that as with any property, these required ongoing maintenance, similar to how they maintained their homes and cars. She said that the general consensus was that this maintenance should be approximately 1.5% of the insured value. She said that they had a ten-year plan listing about $20 million worth of scheduled maintenance for all of their buildings annually.

Ms. Siegmund said that the list was constantly updated, ensuring they were aware of upcoming maintenance needs. She said that however, only half of the required maintenance funding was routinely provided, leaving the other half unfunded. She said that there were two problems encountered. She said that first, a vast majority, approximately 90% of what they received, was funded by bond funds, while only about 1% was cash-funded. She said that they aimed to plan for having all 3R needs covered in the budget. She said that they knew that these requirements would be known to them 10 years in advance, so it was something that could plan for.

Ms. Siegmund said that if it was an $18 to $20 million spread, with some years receiving $15M and others $19M, at least they knew what they were planning for. She said that the issue arose when they did not receive everything required; the funds obtained went behind walls and into ceilings. She said that unfunded items were those that their children interacted with daily. She said that they were not replacing generators at elementary schools in Rock Hill, Garrisonville, or Aquia, as listed on the 2024 plan, which was their current year.

Ms. Siegmund said that her children enjoyed Flashlight Reading Day; however, when generators failed, students went home or were bused to alternative locations with electricity. She said that they were not replacing middle school lockers although they posed a security and safety issue, as well as being inconvenient. She said that due to various factors, including space, malfunctioning lockers became problematic. She said that middle school students already struggled with opening their lockers; improperly functioning ones exacerbated the situation.

Ms. Siegmund said that unfortunately, they were also unable to invest in upgrading their playgrounds. She said that during multiple elementary school tours, she had witnessed playground closures due to safety concerns and awaited repairs or replacement parts. She said that their PTOs often used their funds to cover these costs, which was commendable but may limit their ability to contribute to other school initiatives.

Ms. Siegmund said that when they bond-funded planned expenses, they tied up their borrowing power; if they borrowed $10 million annually for planned expenses, they essentially borrowed the value of an elementary school every five to six years for anticipated needs. She said that this meant that when they postponed these tasks, they had already spent nearly $2 million in unplanned expenses drawn from their operating budget or capital reserves if they managed to complete them on time because they had delayed so much work.

Ms. Siegmund said that 50% of the work they knew needed to be done, they were disregarding in their buildings. She asked how many of the attendees at their home or anything they owned simply overlooked issues that were broken or required repair. She said that they were not painting their schools; they were not replacing fixtures as they needed to. She said that they wanted children to enter a place that looked well-maintained and cared for.

Ms. Siegmund said that replacement of bathroom floor tiles was essential due to safety concerns. She said that addressing these issues became necessary when a child got hurt or faced an emergent problem rather than a planned one. She said that it was more cost-effective to schedule maintenance instead of calling a plumber on a Sunday night. She said that to address this, she suggested aiming to budget for such expenses annually and reducing reliance on debt, ensuring sufficient funds for construction and renovation needs.

Ms. Randall said that their primary objective was to determine how they could collaborate more effectively than before. She said that given their current situation, they should identify actions to improve upon their previous performance since maintaining the status quo was not an option. She said that they aimed to work together better in order to achieve better results as they had done in the past.

Ms. Bohmke said that she appreciated everyone's comments and it was evident that they had considered what they wanted to say. She said that she agreed with them that everything mentioned was unfortunately true and accurate. She said that regarding Ms. Guy's statement about proffers, most of the proffered land for schools was offered under other Boards many years ago. She said she could not agree more with the point that some of that proffered land was not worth it. She said they were well aware that no significant rezonings had been approved in recent years.

Ms. Bohmke said that as Ms. Randall mentioned in her opening comments, four years ago when she joined the Board, there were no schools included in the CIP. She said that there was a superintendent who did not have schools in the CIP at that time. She said that unfortunately, it was not their fault that those schools were not included. She said that it was the responsibility of the school division to bring their needs to them, and those needs were not presented to them. She said that she saw some people shaking their heads. She said that she was not going to place blame, but she believed this statement accurately reflected the situation.

Ms. Bohmke said that she understood all the issues regarding Hartwood, Drew, and Rising Star. She said that as a former representative from the school division, she had visited all these sites and was familiar with each one. She said that she would like to briefly address another matter, as some Board members had questions about Elementary School 19. She said that she met Dr. Chase at the new site.

Ms. Randall said that that was a separate agenda topic that would be addressed in a subsequent presentation. She said that she had another question for Ms. Bohmke. She said that there were rumors regarding the proffered property in Westlake mentioned by Ms. Guy and Ms. Halstead. She said that there was concern about the Board of Supervisors taking dollars instead of property for the Westlake proffers. She asked if Ms. Bohmke could provide clarification.

Ms. Bohmke said that she was not aware of it and it was not a topic that had been discussed in closed sessions.

Dr. Yeung said that she wanted to be clear about the proffers. She said that regarding the Embrey Mill proffers, there were two sites: one for elementary school 18, one for a middle school, and one for a fire station. She said that funding was available specifically for these projects within a certain time frame. She said that when discussing the site's usefulness, it appeared that concerns were raised regarding an easement on the smaller site, but that was something that happened on the side of the School Board. She said that talking about the site not being conducive for building, that happened with the Board of Supervisors.

Dr. Yeung said that the Board of Supervisors made a decision to swap the land intended for middle or elementary schools, which was initially planned to be located at the flat area near Embrey Mill, where soccer complexes were currently situated. She said that the School Board and the Board of Supervisors both played a role in these decisions. She said that she was not a member of either Board at that time. She said that she wanted to ensure that people were aware that this situation did not reflect the individuals responsible for providing the site.

Dr. Yeung said that Embrey Mill had been planned and built since 1980 for the three things that residents in Embrey Mill paid for but could not currently access. She said that when discussing Hartwood, she clarified that no disrespect was intended toward Supervisor English, but Hartwood possessed farmland that they could sell to anyone and build homes on it. She said that they needed to accommodate these children by placing them into schools.

Dr. Yeung said that they were planning to add two schools in Hartwood while not including a school in Embrey Mill. She said that upon joining the Board, she was the one following up and supporting Dr. Chase regarding Drew. She said she had discussed the roaches falling from the ceilings and was instructed not to mention it. She said that now they had roaches, rats, and various other issues, as well as mold. She said that was their current situation. She said that Drew had risen to the top position.

Dr. Yeung said that they must ensure that they were accountable for their actions. She said that they needed to guarantee that the funds provided to the School Board were being spent appropriately and transparently. She said that when they allocated money for three schools and combined it, causing an increase in cost due to expansion or enlargement, and then requested additional funding, she was opposed to this practice, especially when the intended construction site was not utilized as planned.

Ms. Allen asked what the cost would be if they did Drew and one elementary versus what was currently slated in the CIP now. She said that she was eager to find out why the costs of bundling 18 and 19 went up besides inflation adjustments. She said that she had pushed for the elementary schools to be built due to the cost savings. She said that she was not opposed to the plan proposed by the School Board. She said that outside of inflation adjustments, the numbers needed to make sense for her to support this plan.

Ms. Allen said that in the meantime, she would like to explore an alternative option. She said that she had advocated for Drew's condition and initially was willing to let Drew be secondary to those two options due to cost savings. She said that if they were suggesting that there was not a significant cost savings for the 18 and 19, she needed to know what alternative was available for Drew and one elementary school.

Ms. Bohmke said that there would be no bundling, as it was understood.

Ms. Allen said that she did not see the value in bundling. She said that she would like to see an alternative option for funding and learn what the figures would potentially be.

Mr. Jason Towery said they could work on that issue. He said that regarding the 18 and 19 bundling, as Ms. Randall mentioned, they could display the slide and discuss it further.

Mr. English said that if performance was as poor as they claimed it to be, and he trusted their judgment based on their knowledge of Hartwood and Drew, he asked why they did not take the funding instead of building number 18 at this time and immediately address Drew's issues. He said that the situation could change suddenly, potentially causing problems if they did not act promptly.

Mr. English said that another point to consider was whether they had thought about combining Drew and Rising Star into one larger school when constructing Drew. He said that if the land was there, why could they not expand for an additional 200 or 300 students at Rising Star. He asked if they would save money in the long run from doing that instead of rebuilding them on the same properties.

Dr. Taylor said that there were fundamentally different groups of children with varying needs, which presented a significant challenge. He said that regarding building larger schools to save money, this suggestion had been proposed and recommended by Mr. English during the Joint Schools Working Committee meeting. He said that they had responded to this recommendation as part of the cost adjustment strategy, which involved constructing bigger schools. He said that the next thing to be considered was how large was too large and what services were required at each location.

Dr. Taylor said that a thousand-student elementary school appeared to be quite substantial in size and probably the maximum size possible. He said that in terms of a thousand-student middle school, he believed that it was quite small, but in fairness to the Supervisors and in the interest of transparency, it had been on the CIP as an 1100-student middle school. He said that they would not recommend maintaining this size moving forward because there were potential efficiencies in the future for them to build it a little larger to focus on accommodating more middle school students rather than pre-K students and consider growing in the K-8 space.

Dr. Taylor said that it should be noted that they needed to be cautious about the services provided in both places. He said that one of the challenges they currently faced with Drew was that they had two distinctly different student populations occupying the same space, which could lead to conflict. He said that there was a day school component as well, the Heather Enfield Day School, located in the basement of Drew. He said that it had a separate entrance and facility, effectively managed in terms of how they locked down hallways and managed student populations outside and during the day.

Dr. Taylor said that they considered this arrangement suboptimal. He said that it may make more sense for them to move a portion of the day school to be more aligned with Rising Star than not. He said that he believed that the current slide would help illustrate the benefits of site selection and why such a decision might save some money. He said that if one were to co-locate facilities on one piece of property, there was potential for further exploration. He said that the property on the left was actually the former Gary Melchers former Gayle Junior High Middle School site. He said that the building was located on the left side, and they had conducted a test fit to assess how a middle school could be placed on the property.

Dr. Taylor said that by doing this, they could effectively build the structure on the athletic fields while simultaneously having the existing building in operation. He said that once completed, students could move into the new structure, allowing for both buildings to operate concurrently during construction. He said that this approach avoided dislocating students and resulted in significant cost savings. He said that although it may be challenging to have two separate facilities on the same property at once, this strategy ensured minimal disruption to student learning.

Mr. English asked if Garrisonville Middle did not combine with Garrisonville Elementary. He said that he suggested that having the Rising Star and Drew projects on the same property could work well in that location. He said that if they tore the Gayle Middle School property and demolished it, they could potentially sell the land to help cover the costs related to constructing another school. He said that he was attempting to explore alternative solutions in order to save money.

Dr. Taylor said that conceptually, that option was feasible, but he did not believe that the Melchers property was large enough for that.

Mr. English said that he agreed regarding the specific property in question. He said that in his opinion, Drew was the most suitable choice.

Dr. Taylor said that the other piece of property was too small.

Mr. English asked if they could purchase additional property from anyone in the area.

Dr. Taylor said that one must also examine the topography surrounding that area, which was somewhat unfavorable as well. He said that he agreed with the two concepts presented by Mr. English that he believed were crucial for both bodies to carefully consider. He said that the important ideas were: how to most efficiently utilize the assets currently available, which included properties with buildings on them, and what was the optimal size of school to accommodate the most people. He said that considering that constructing larger schools now meant building fewer schools in the future, it may initially present an unfavorable cost. He said that this approach could potentially save more money in the long term.

Mr. English said that if they were to eliminate Drew and instead do Rising Star, it may necessitate removing the stadium and football fields. He said that the facilities could potentially be shared with another entity. He said that his focus was on saving money and expediting progress in the long term.

Ms. Randall said that they shared fields with both middle schools and high schools at Brooke Point and Stafford Middle, as they were co-located on one campus. She said that relocating students off campus might also pose a problem.

<u>UPDATE ON INCREASED PROJECT COSTS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS 18 AND 19 AND ASSOCIATED COST SAVINGS WITH “BUNDLING”</u>

Mr. Towery said that they would discuss some costs related to Elementary Schools 18 and 19. He said that the figures were projected in September at approximately $81 million, which included both schools. He said that it was estimated school 18 would require around $78 million and school 19 would need nearly $79 million. He said that in the past three months, they had collaborated with engineers and architects to refine these plans further. He said that elementary school 19 was recently submitted approximately three weeks ago. He said that as a result, they had adjusted the figures based on more current projections.

Mr. Towery said that they were hopeful that these numbers may decrease slightly. He said that regarding bundling, they should focus on this aspect for a moment as it was crucial. He said that there have been numerous questions regarding this topic. He said that Elementary School 18 and 19 were currently being designed as prototypes. He said that if they created a prototype correctly, it would not be built only once or twice; ideally, it would be constructed five, six, or seven times.

Mr. Towery said that by rebuilding the prototype, design costs were saved each time. He said that certain design updates and site plans, permits, and other construction requirements still needed to be addressed in subsequent rebuildings. He said that 10 years from now, the prototypes would not be identical to today's plans, but significant savings could be achieved in terms of basic layouts, preliminary designs, and conceptual concepts for these schools. He said that reaching this point was a substantial achievement. He said that they had projected approximately $5.6 million in design cost reductions.

Mr. Towery said that by designing Elementary Schools 18 and 19 together, they were saving over what was originally budgeted for their design costs. He said that there was active savings being realized now. He said that some questions had arisen regarding other potential savings; however, they did not know yet. He said that they were currently in a waiting game between finalizing their plans and when they would go out to bid. He said that hopefully by this summer, they would have a much better understanding of the market situation.

Mr. Towery said that regardless of whether the projects were combined under one contractor or bids were staggered by a month or two, they still projected likely construction savings in either scenario. He said that ultimately, they had considered that there was a significant long-term savings in the maintenance of prototype schools. He said that it was because they could project maintenance schedules more effectively and plan maintenance better when they had similar buildings, products, and systems in place. He said that this was something that would be a benefit they could enjoy over time.

Mr. Towery said that currently, approximately $20 million of the updated costs, which amounted to around $76 million for Elementary School 18 and $73 million for Elementary School 19, were due to inflation between now and 2026. He said that the schools were needed now; no one would argue against that. He said that they currently had trailers at eight or nine sites, and they were looking at an additional six or seven this year. He said that they currently had at least an elementary school's worth of trailers on site, with more to come. He said that the temporary structures did incur costs, as the Supervisors knew. He said that his concern was that if they continued to delay the project, they would likely see increased expenses for trailers and other inflationary costs down the road.

Mr. Towery said that they should discuss the space requirements for a moment, as they were the primary factor driving this decision. He said that inflation and space were the two main factors that had changed between last year's CIP number and this year. He said that regarding the recent discussion, the current school was approximately 20% to 25% larger in terms of total gross square footage compared to a year ago. He said that the increase was due to several factors, including their efforts to ensure that the school could accommodate the projected student population, as they had heard from everyone involved. He said that everyone discussed design capacity and program capacity, and he asked what was the difference between these two concepts.

Mr. Towery said that a good example involved Conway Elementary School. He said that if he placed it into the new prototype, he would fill every classroom and resource room. He said that he still would have one resource room left for use as a classroom and approximately four half-resource rooms remaining. He said that Conway Elementary School's program fit almost perfectly into their prototype with just a little extra space. He said that currently, there were 950 students at Conway Elementary School. He said that four trailers were currently in use, and two more would be added this year.

Ms. Bohmke said that when redistricting was conducted for all elementary school students, the School Board made a decision not to relocate students from Conway, who could have been rezoned or redistricted to Grafton Village and Ferry Farm. She said that as evident from the sheet, all their numbers were green. She said that the School Board decided to take this action. She said that the School Board made that informed decision, and the children were not relocated from Conway as they should have been.

Ms. Randall said that two years ago, they moved children from Conway to Grafton.

Mr. Towery said that they could make the exact comparison with Park Ridge and Stafford Elementary, both of which experienced trailers. He said that what they were saying was, the program capacity, the number of students attending that school, and the space they should have, fit exactly into the school they proposed to construct. He said that this required additional classrooms. He said that on the slide was an actual photo of Hartwood Elementary School, taken just a few weeks ago. He said that the chalkboard in the hallway represented the current situation at some of their schools.

Mr. Towery said that going back to the previous slide, it illustrated the pullout space at Rocky Run Elementary School, which was a storage closet, and there was a hallway classroom there as well.

He said that this was the situation they observed frequently. He said that they could not construct yesterday's prototype, the old Stafford design, using today's program. He said that it simply did not function as intended. He said that they compared themselves to McNair Upper Elementary, one of the schools visited by several School Board members, and compared themselves to Prince William County schools.

Mr. Towery said that the former had a very efficient and effective design. He said that the architect for the project was the same one who was working on theirs. He said that regarding the total square footage per classroom, their current average was approximately 2,000 square feet per student, which was 126 versus a range of 140 to 180 in other areas such as Prince William. He said that they must also consider the updated building codes, ADA standards, and recommendations for larger schools when planning their facilities.

Dr. Taylor said that he would briefly summarize certain points to bring the Board's attention to a few matters that he and his colleagues had addressed. He said that the first issue highlighted as a major concern was the distinction between design capacity and program capacity. He said that they had been asked to develop a design that better aligned program capacity with design capacity, which they had accomplished. He said that they were asked to build a school that did not resemble the Taj Mahal in terms of extravagance, which they had completed as well.

Dr. Taylor said that they had been required to construct a larger school capable of accommodating more students. He said that they had successfully delivered on these expectations in a cost-effective manner compared to Fairfax and Prince William, with better utilization than both, and would cater to their student population while delaying the need for additional schools on a longer timeline.

Dr. Taylor said that they understood that larger schools required more resources and cost more due to inflationary factors, which was unfortunate and affected everyone financially. He said that if given a chance to travel back in time seven years, every person in the room would agree on building schools with the lower dollar figure based on current knowledge. He said that this was not possible. He said that today, they all concurred that the chosen course of action was better for future endeavors.

Ms. Gary said that she did not always trust the School Board nor did she always agree with them. She said that it was not her role to do so, as she had not elected any of them. She said that therefore, it was their responsibility to address the concerns of their constituents. She said that she appreciated Dr. Chase's candor regarding bundling and potential savings, as this was a significant concern for her in light of what occurred with 18 and 19.

Ms. Gary said that there was no need to revisit these events further, but she was not satisfied with the outcome. She said that she personally risked her reputation by advocating for additional resources to fund what she believed were essential requirements. She said that she did not believe this was a wish list. She said that she believed they had cut and removed unnecessary elements as much as possible.

Ms. Gary said that if they were honest, if it were their own homes and they outgrew them, they would make upgrades or purchase a new home instead of placing one of their family members in a trailer in the backyard. She said that they would do this because they cared for people, and she thanked them for doing the same thing. She said that regarding the 18 and 19 project, 19 would be located on the athletic fields. She asked if that decision had been made and whether there was a traffic study related to that project. She requested a brief explanation of that matter.

Ms. Bohmke said that the question was in reference to the vote the School Board had to construct elementary school 19 next to Brooke Point High School on the athletic fields.

Mr. Towery said that they recently received the draft traffic study approximately one or two weeks ago. He said that it indicated no negative effects. He said that apart from requiring some restriping along Black Hawk Drive, the situation was that due to staggered school hours, intersections and roadways in the area were currently accommodating a high school population of over 2,000 students. He said that in contrast, their adjacent facility had approximately half that number entering and exiting during peak times, but there were off-peak times as well.

Mr. Towery said that as part of the proposal, they were suggesting that a better connection be established around the back of Brooke Point High School. He said that this would enable traffic, car riders, and buses to utilize the Stafford Middle School entrance off of Spartan Drive, which had not been possible previously.

Ms. Gary asked if they would hold any community meetings at the location. She said that when attendees discovered that increased traffic would utilize roads previously disconnected, this information would be beneficial.

Ms. Randall said that there were no homeowners affected in this case.

Ms. Gary said that there were houses on the road the middle school was located on.

Ms. Randall said that was correct.

Mr. Towery said that along Spartan Drive, it was evident that there was additional elementary and high school traffic accessing the area at times. He said that the decision to operate car rider lines versus buses would determine the specific traffic patterns along this road. He said that one of their primary objectives in designing this new facility had been to provide flexibility.

Mr. Towery said that during a recent site visit with Ms. Bohmke and Dr. Chase, they discussed how to make the site as adaptable as possible for future use by high school, elementary, and potentially middle school students. He said that to accommodate these needs, they had presented several options for the Board's consideration that would require additional funds. He said that these proposals aimed to create a versatile layout that would benefit all three schools and cater to their unique requirements.

Ms. Allen said that her concern was regarding the transparency of the decisions made by the School Board. She said that if they acknowledged that there is no definitive prototype or modeling they wanted to use for future reference, it would be preferable for her not to see hard numbers as a basis for their plans. She said that during the process of determining what works best for their County, they may realize that the initial model was never the most suitable option. She said that she recommended avoiding adherence to a price model until they were certain about their intended approach.

Ms. Allen said that this would help them make informed decisions without being influenced by an inaccurate tax rate. She said that she did not want to be told so late in the process because she needed to address such questions. She said that during the previous budget season, they established a tax rate based on the schools' request. She said that if they expected her, as Ms. Gary suggested, to put her neck on the line, which she was willing to do since their children deserved the best education possible, she must have up-to-date and accurate information provided in a timely manner. She said that was all she asked for in terms of transparency.

Ms. Bohmke said that in this context, the Supervisors were frustrated because they were all accountable to taxpayers. She said that for her part, speaking only for herself, if she were in a room with 150 constituents at Falmouth Elementary, she would need to explain why they were building an elementary school next to Brooke Point High School when they were tearing up assets that the County already owned, including tennis courts built twice and practice fields. She said that she could not justify the School Board’s decision to build there instead of Embrey Mill, which was already prepared for development.

Ms. Bohmke said that she could not personally stand in front of all these people and tell them how that site was justified. She said that she did not have an answer and it did not make sense to her. She said that she had never seen a division destroy assets that they already owned when they had a site in a specific location and build something where the growth was in the Embrey Mill area. She said that she needed someone in the room to explain this to her and why that vote was taken the way it was.

Ms. Siegmund said that she could only speak for herself. She said that for her, it was when she examined the longest bus routes in the County; they all crossed Interstate 95. She said that moreover, these routes were over an hour long and serve elementary school students. She said that when they place an elementary school in Embrey Mill, it would necessitate longer bus routes due to the current situation where Anthony Burns was 90% filled with children busing from the Aquia District, and Hampton Oaks was over 50% full of children coming from the Aquia District.

Ms. Siegmund said that at Winding Creek, less than half of the children came from the Garrisonville District; however, a significant number are bused from Falmouth and Aquia Districts. She said that if they added another elementary school to the Garrisonville area, they would need to fill it with students. She said that the question rose about those children would come from. She said that they would have to continue busing them further or face pulling kids back into the newly built school if they placed it in that location.

Ms. Siegmund said that constructing two schools simultaneously would avoid this issue and maintain a balanced distribution of students. She said that in essence, they were ensuring that all crayons in the box were used fairly. She said that it was evident that schools such as Rock Hill, Ferry Farm, and Widewater would not experience significant population shifts due to busing for children residing at the furthest ends of the County.

Ms. Siegmund said that if they established a school in Embrey Mill, having their students from Garrisonville attend would result in moving them back. She said that then, they must find who would attend Garrisonville Elementary. She said that if they relocated 250 students from Garrisonville Elementary, where would those children go after being transferred to Margaret Brent. She said that it raised the question regarding the new distribution of students.

Ms. Bohmke said that she appreciated the point raised but noted that the statement required clarification. She said that Ms. Siegmund mentioned that the proposal made sense; however, it did not result in a unanimous vote by their Board. She said that she needed someone to explain why this decision was made to her Board since she did not understand why they were liquidating assets that already belonged to the County.

Ms. Allen said that there did not appear to be unanimous support for placing 19 in its current position.

Ms. Bohmke said that they had submitted the plans.

Ms. Allen said that they needed to determine this among themselves since they had reservations regarding that decision. She said that she had concerns about assigning Brooke Point. She said that she did not understand why an elementary school was required at Brooke Point, even considering the provided information. She said that if they suggested that busing schedules and routes were affected, she asked for data on what a realignment would entail, including bus times and potential fuel costs. She said this would allow her to compare these expenses with the cost savings of constructing at Embrey Mill.

Ms. Allen said that she needed concrete figures to support the decision for 19 at Brooke Point. She said that she could not simply agree that they were destroying assets they had built, only to rebuild them later, while children without those services attended Brooke Point in the meantime. She said that they would be affected to some extent when they did not need to be. She said that she needed to understand why that decision was being made.

Ms. Allen said that she did not know if Ms. Light and Mr. Fulmer could potentially present a five-to-ten-year plan for their tax purposes regarding the necessary tax rate to accommodate their 3R construction projects. She said that this was important because a significant amount of money was involved, which could not be addressed in isolation. In a ten-year timeframe, she wanted to know what such a plan would look like so that they could determine how to achieve it and ensure the schools were built and maintained at an adequate level despite previous underfunding.

Ms. Siegmund said that she would like to follow up on a point mentioned earlier. She said that her concern regarding the corrections or adjustments and the loss of the second property proffered in the Garrisonville District. She said that they still needed to reserve land for a future middle school, as H.H. Pool Middle School, their largest and most crowded middle school, had insufficient capacity. She said that although Middle School 9 was further down the CIP, land availability was limited in their area.

Ms. Siegmund said that the Garrisonville District did not have much vacant space, and growth continued unabated. She said that they must be strategic about where these schools were located. She said that they had lost their middle school property, which was of greater importance. She said that they could not build an additional middle school in the north if they did not have the land for it.

Mr. Vosburg said that he was asked to address the property in Embrey Mill, which had two sites. He said that one site was currently less suitable and would require modifications. He said that their team was collaborating with the developer to work on these changes. He said that so far, the process with the developer had been positive. He said that they may end up acquiring both sites. He said that they were uncertain about the appearance and extent of the site curving, as well as how much of it would be free and clear. He said that the other site was more suitable for an elementary school. He said that they were working with the developer to clarify the situation regarding the first site before receiving it.

Dr. Yeung said that if they put the elementary school next to Brooke Point, it would prevent them from being able to rebuild Brooke Point. She said that this issue must be considered as a part of this plan.

Mr. English said that no one had discussed the bus garage yet. He asked if it had been considered to have the County take over the bus garage and run it. He said that it might be worth considering as it could reduce their workload slightly.

Ms. Randall said that their current CIP outlined their top priorities as Elementary Schools 18 and 19. She said that their said their focus was on realigning the opening dates for Rising Star, Hartwood, and Drew. She said that she also wanted to draw attention to Embrey Mill, where they currently had Elementary School 20 in the CIP.

Dr. Chase said that she would like to clarify as someone who voted in favor of using the Embrey Mill site that she did discuss bus routes with staff due to her concerns regarding transportation. She said that the staff informed her that the bus routes would be of the same length and that they would simply need to turn right or left at a specific light on Route 1. She said that it was her understanding that this was not a reason against choosing Embrey Mill.

Ms. Halstead said that regarding Ms. Gary’s comment, she understood that it was not easy for them to trust either of the decisions made when they were asked to look at something and speak on behalf of the schools. She said that there had been frustration expressed regarding the process of selecting a site when information was presented to them. She said that their role was not only to address the current scope but also to look futuristically at how these buildings would accommodate future student populations. She said that redistricting children every two years due to preferred sites was not sustainable for their school system.

Ms. Halstead said that the Aquia side was experiencing significant housing development, while the Hartwood side was seeing an influx of housing as well. She said that this created an untenable situation for the school system to have to select a site that may have been preferred by someone else. She said that this was not intended to be unkind to anyone else. She said that when the information was presented to them in terms of location bases and where they could go, and then considering it strategically and thinking about how few redistricts they could possibly make or what could be done, there was no right solution.

Ms. Halstead said that this applied to both sides of their fence because it was happening too fast. She said that people might feel frustrated that they might not choose a location, while she and her team were also frustrated that they could not halt the construction. She said she found it intriguing that she felt the burden of what was left for her by past Boards, as they were dealing with the information available to them at that time. She said that from a strategic standpoint, she was trying to discern a clearer picture, and the fog had lifted a little more. She said that they could not stop growth from 1980 or 1950, and she did not know why.

Ms. Halstead said that she also did not know if there was such a thing as a building moratorium. She said that addressing this issue in the County required looking strategically at how it occurred. She said that although the preferred location might not be ideal for everyone, when the space was presented and the totality of the building's development was considered, many people expressed their liking for a campus-like situation. She said that her children would attend schools on this same site, which was inviting to some.

Ms. Halstead said that they would go from elementary to middle to high school, creating a sense of community and family. She said that everyone would know each other in all the schools, and connections between families would be evident. She said that there were other factors besides land appropriation, particularly from her perspective, that influenced the decision. She said that everyone must be open to considering these factors, given the current situation in Stafford County.

Ms. Vanuch said that her question was whether the growth chart demonstrated the anticipated growth due to the residential developments approved 20 to 30 years ago, like Westlake, and how they would impact their planning and zoning. She said that she wanted to express her appreciation for the efforts made by Mr. White in providing more insight into these matters compared to previous years. She said that his team had done an excellent job collaborating with the planning and zoning staff to predict the effects of these developments on their community.

Ms. Vanuch said that as they continued to approve new schools, it would be helpful to understand how this growth would affect their existing infrastructure and resources. She said that if they were getting Elementary School 18, 19, and High School 6, what did the growth chart transition to in what period of time. She said that it appeared that they had already approved these schools, so it was easy to dismiss.

Ms. Vanuch said that to be transparent, it was okay to show that it was good for three or four years. She said that if they found themselves in the green and yellow zones, they understood the situation well enough and were working collaboratively with others so that they would not dismiss schools based solely on their status on the chart but rather to use this information as part of their decision-making process. She said that then they could look back and identify reasons for moving specific schools up or maintaining their current position.

Ms. Randall said that part of the challenge for them was in the fact that redistricting would have been necessary, but they had not done it, so they could not necessarily give good information regarding the schools.

Dr. Taylor said that they could analyze this from a broader perspective, breaking it down into various levels: elementary, middle, and high schools. He said that they would not focus on specific attendance zones until the school was zoned.

Ms. Vanuch asked if they could include an overlay displaying the number of students based on the projected charts, which included the subdivisions being added. She said that in this way, one could analyze a hypothetical scenario.

Dr. Taylor said that without a redistricting, it was difficult to be accurate.

Ms. Vanuch said that she understood that fact.

Dr. Taylor said that Ms. Vanuch was correct in her thinking. He said that they knew from being over 100% capacity to opening two schools in elementary school to being just under capacity. He said that they could provide that information to him so that they could help plan better. He said that they knew from looking at the future and looking at this chart, just even looking at the numbers, they were kind of right back at this in just a couple of years, almost at every level except for middle school, but they bought themselves a little bit more room.

Dr. Taylor that they would rebuild Drew a little bit bigger than it was originally conceived. He said that maybe they did not have to do middle school 9 as soon as they had planned and they could kick that out a couple of years. He said that it was a great suggestion that they could furnish it at a high level and also look into doing it at the lower level.

Ms. Gary said that as they discussed the current decision regarding the location for 19 and the Embrey Mill site, but she would ask if there were any other sites their staff considered and how many there were. She said that specific locations were not required at this time. She said that she wanted to know what they had actually experienced to reach this point and what alternatives had been presented to the School Board since she did not possess that data at the time.

Dr. Taylor said that presented was a model of County school cooperation and collaboration as they had a joint land committee that examined suitable sites. He said that they identified a dozen potential viable sites for consideration, with some being more viable than others. He said that both on the east side and west side of I-95, County and school staff made recommendations to the School Board.

Ms. Gary asked if by a dozen Dr. Taylor was referring to 12 or so properties that were passed before reaching the Brooke Point High School property.

Dr. Taylor said that was correct.

Ms. Gary said that this had a significant impact on her constituents and her family, which was somewhat personal. She said that she tried to separate them, but being human sometimes made it challenging. She said that the fields mentioned were used by JROTC, in which her daughter participated. She said that middle school field hockey and many other sports also utilized those fields. She said that she had concern that children may be disadvantaged if they proceeded with their plan.

Ms. Gary said that given the knowledge of how the schools already functioned at those locations, she would like more background information regarding the decision-making process. She said she would like to know if, as their Board considered various potential sites, they were consistently divided throughout the evaluation.

Ms. Healy said that she was not certain that they could respond to that. She said that these discussions took place during closed sessions, and they respected the confidentiality of closed sessions. She said that it was evident that there were other sites considered; however, if someone wished to delve into specifics, she believed that the Board would need to consider whether they wanted to disclose that information.

Ms. Bohmke said that during their discussion, Supervisor Gary raised an important question regarding the impact of rebuilding Stafford High School on students' extracurricular activities. She recalled that during the previous renovation, the tennis team had to relocate to UMW for two years due to the temporary loss of their courts. She asked if specific details could be provided about which groups would be affected and how they would have access to events during the construction of the elementary school. She said that it was crucial to consider not only sports activities but also other significant aspects of high school and middle school students' lives.

Mr. Towery said that they had worked closely with both middle and high school teams to address their concerns. He said that he wished he had a layout up there to explain better. He said that there were primarily two areas impacted: the marching band field area if one was familiar with the site. He said that when entering Brooke Point, there was the junior parking lot on the left-hand side. He said that beyond that, there were the tennis courts and the area known as the marching band field where students participated in ROTC activities.

Mr. Towery said that this was where the school would be situated. He said that the tennis courts would be rebuilt further down at the back to avoid disruption to their season. He said that the timing for this was that it would be one of the first activities to occur. He said that they anticipated a one-school year disruption, during which juniors would lose most of the junior parking lot. He said that during this school year, the parking situation would be significantly affected.

Mr. Towery said that after this period, the current junior parking lot and the bus loop, also known as the horseshoe bus loop, would be rebuilt into a single large parking lot. He said that from a parking perspective, there would only be one year of impact. He said that in terms of overall field usage, they had collaborated closely with Brooke Point and Stafford Middle staff to ensure that their activities were not affected. He said that these staff members were confident that the proposed reconstructed fields would be more than sufficient for their current needs.

Dr. Yeung asked if it was correct that the prototype for the schools could be used anywhere in the County.

Mr. Towery said that considering certain site parameters, yes.

Dr. Yeung said that there could be significant savings achieved by consolidating three elementary schools simultaneously in the past. She said that she was not saying that to negate Brookee due to the decision made. She said that she found it puzzling that Embrey Mill had an enrollment of 2032 while Garrisonville was the largest District in Stafford County in terms of constituents and student population.

Dr. Yeung asked if anyone disagreed with this observation so far. She said that Garrisonville held the distinction of being the largest District in Stafford County with the highest number of students enrolled. She said that they had admitted Augustine and Aquia District during the redistricting process, although she was unsure if this had changed since then. She said that she just wanted to confirm that they were aware of the increasing percentage of need for Garrisonville and its students next year.

Dr. Yeung asked why they were waiting to address this issue. She said that if they built a new facility, whether it was at Griffis-Widewater or Garrisonville, it would eliminate the need for additional trailers. She said that it would help alleviate the pressure on staff, especially if they had indicated that this is where the solution should be implemented. She asked what the percentage of student increase for next year was at Garrisonville.

Mr. Towery said that he was unsure of Garrisonville specifically, but the overall percentage was approximately 1.9%.

Dr. Yeung said that she would like to be provided with information regarding the District-level student enrollment increases.

Mr. Diggs asked if the elementary school site was a done deal.

Ms. Guy said that it was her understanding that approval following the vote was required, but the School Board had voted to put the school on that site.

Dr. Taylor said that the site selection for schools was a decision made by the School Board; however, the Board of Supervisors decided what monies were appropriated for school construction projects.

Ms. Bohmke said that in light of the discussion this evening, she would like to propose an idea. She said that she knew that many people, including herself, wanted to request additional information from the School Board regarding Ferry Farm's massive renovations. She said that those projects had been completed and that they had provided answers to their questions via email. She said that she would clarify that they now had a response and an itemized list detailing all expenditures and total costs, which would be beneficial for Supervisor Diggs' constituents.

Ms. Bohmke said that considering the concerns raised about Drew Middle School tonight, she had not visited the school in a while, and if it was being suggested that it may not last until 2028 when the rebuild was scheduled to be completed, these two Boards should collaborate and potentially swap Drew Middle School and Elementary School 19.

Ms. Bohmke said that they should place item 19 on hold. She said that she decided not to bundle it to save money and they should move Drew Middle School up instead, as well as considering Rising Star. She said that it may be necessary to have another meeting because the information regarding Drew Middle School and Rising Star was of great concern.

Ms. Bohmke said that she had had numerous conversations with Dr. Chase, and two of her three children attended that school. She said that while it was a great institution, based on recent information, they must ensure that students were in a safe environment. She said that in light of this new information, she did not believe they could proceed without further investigation. She said that she was concerned about the mold issue. She asked if mold tests had been conducted at the school recently and what the results were.

Mr. Towery said that they found one location in one of the storage closets in the gymnasium beneath a mat. He said that they routinely tested for mold, asbestos, and other hazardous substances.

Ms. Bohmke asked what the schedule was for regular testing.

Dr. Taylor said that it was on an as-needed and an annual basis depending on the different testing requirements. He said that regular asbestos testing was necessary based on the facility's age. He said that mold and similar issues typically arose after receiving reports about them. He said that upon discovering a case during remediation, they would take a closer look to address the situation.

Ms. Bohmke asked if they were in the process of remediating that right now.

Dr. Taylor said yes.

Ms. Bohmke asked how long that would take.

Dr. Taylor said that it would not be more than a couple of weeks.

Ms. Bohmke asked if the Board was aware of this matter. She said that some were saying yes and others were saying no.

Mr. English said that his concern was that he did not know the extent of the situation. He said that he knew it was bad, but he did not realize how severe it was. He asked if there was a plan in case something escalated tomorrow and if they had determined where the children would be placed until a solution was found.

Mr. English said that regarding the mold study, he recommended conducting it every three months instead of at arbitrary intervals. He said that if the schedule was followed, even if it was for a small area, it would ensure consistency. He said that his was his genuine concern and asked for their plan in case of an emergency at Drew.

Ms. Randall said that she would like to address one of the key issues discussed last year and mentioned in this meeting as well, which was growth. She said that losing ES19 would pose a significant challenge due to the number of trailers they currently had and would need to keep. She said that she understood there may be hesitation regarding Brooke Point High School, but she emphasized that it was crucial for them to support Elementary School 18 and Elementary School 19 when the vote came. She said that by doing so, they would demonstrate their commitment to moving forward with plans already paid for, selecting a site, and completing site work.

Ms. Randall said that money has been invested in this project, and they must consider its impact on their community's growth. She said that pulling back and rolling out something different implies a loss of cost. She said that this was something to consider. She said that she was not saying that they did not have problems with their current infrastructure and the Elementary School 19 site. She said that that had been their Board decision.

Ms. Randall said that they came to them today, knowing that those projects were secured, feeling the accolades of that achievement, and moving forward with their next issue, which was deteriorating buildings. She said that they faced both a growth problem and an aged facility problem. She said that they felt good about addressing growth last year, and this year, they were focusing on aged facilities.

Ms. Healy said that she believed it was a point worth considering. She said that the question she would raise to the Board of Supervisors regarding deferring Project 19 and proceeding with Drew and Rising Star. She said that considering the estimated cost, advancing with Drew and Rising Star would require approximately $84 million more than moving forward with Elementary 19. She said that this was not a definitive answer for today but that she wanted assurances that the necessary funding would be available before exploring this option further.

Ms. Healy said that given the significant amount of money involved, it was crucial to address this concern. She said that unfortunately, due to the locations under discussion, they could not opt for Drew or Rising Star alone. She asked if they could provide insight into the funding availability, as it would significantly impact their decision-making process.

Ms. Vanuch said the community was aware of the problems and understood that new schools were necessary. She said that they learned that their initial proposal of a 40% tax rate faced significant community backlash, leading them to explore alternative funding sources. She said that on the economic development side, they had successfully attracted their first data centers with plans in place.

Ms. Vanuch said that as they progressed through this process, she would like them to project the aggressive schedules that some of these approved data centers were planning for their rack and stack operations on the CIP. She said that this would help them better understand when those substantial revenues would begin coming in. She said that regarding the data center agreement, they had gone opposite of many other localities and implemented front-loading.

Ms. Vanuch said that as a result, they were receiving more money on the front end to address some of the school construction needs versus on the back end. She said that they would be generating a lot more tax revenue on the front end than initially discussed as a Board and ensuring that they were able to utilize some of that revenue to offset some of the school costs. She said that the second piece was that their Board unanimously voted to accept legislation as part of their legislative package agenda to increase their sales tax from half a percent to 1%.

Ms. Vanuch said that all of that money would go to school construction and it would sunset after 25 years. She said that if it passed the General Assembly this year and was signed off by the Governor, it would enable them to move forward and get that on the ballot immediately. She said that they needed to be on the same page regarding which schools were being rebuilt or built so the voters were informed about the sales tax because that was one of the only other avenues of revenue that they had as a local level.

Ms. Vanuch said that it would be challenging for them to raise taxes on this end, however, the sales tax was different, and they would need the School Board's support to share with the community what that looked like and the benefits of that for schools. She said that they must decide which options they were pursuing. She said that it should be a unanimous 14 to 0 vote because if there was a weak link in the chain, the referendum that would not pass.

Ms. Vanuch said that it also meant they must track other things going on in the General Assembly, such as regional transportation authorities that may also increase the sales tax, would directly impact voters who might be hesitant to raise multiple taxes. She said that they were on the same page as the School Board. She said she did not think the community was quite aware. She said that she recalled that it was $25 million a year they would receive from that 1% sales tax. She said that it was a significant amount of money to be added to the budget.

Ms. Bohmke said that they were also fighting for the COCA. She said that she believed they should all select a day to visit Richmond as a group to advocate for the COCA.

Mr. Diggs said that as he listened to the discussion regarding the building projects of 18 and 19, as well as addressing the issues with Rising Star and Drew, and as they discussed pumping the lines out for the lead and similar tasks, 2028 was not an acceptable solution. He said that children experiencing rats, roaches, and similar issues falling from ceilings in Stafford County was unacceptable.

Mr. Diggs said that he felt anger but chose to remain silent. He said that he was sitting in a comfortable environment. He said that he could not fathom the daily struggles of students attending such schools and who were expected to learn. He said that this should put a fire under all of them in this room, because they were the leaders of this community and 2028 was just not acceptable.

Dr. Warner said that she would like to emphasize that they face numerous challenges. She said that Rising Star, which focused on early childhood education, was a significant concern for her as she was deeply passionate about this area. She said that she spent a considerable amount of time at Rising Star. She said that she disliked the fact that their youngest learners and most vulnerable students were in that facility.

Dr. Warner said that addressing the relocation of students was impossible if they had overcrowded schools. She said that as a result, finding emergency locations for middle school, elementary school, or Rising Star students became challenging when their schools were already at full capacity. She said that this was why the Board decided to prioritize capacity first and then address other needs.

Dr. Warner said that the situation could be compared to a house on fire with part of it collapsing; both issues need attention. She said that they recognized that the County did not have sufficient funds to build six new schools, but they required six schools. She said that this was where the problem lie. She said that they were striving to make the best decision possible to meet growth needs and have resources for emergencies.

Ms. Guy said she wanted to thank everyone for thinking outside the box or presenting them with solutions. She said that she was open to whatever decisions her Board made because she strove to be easy-going. She said that she would emphasize that their schools required more capacity. She said that Rising Star was in a precarious state, and Drew was no exception. She said that entering elementary schools, children often tripped over their backpacks and hit their heads on desks.

Ms. Guy said that this was an everyday occurrence because of the maneuvering around. She said that this raised safety concerns as well. She said that if they were to discuss all the minor issues that they addressed and make them public, then people might say they needed to do something to fix them. She said that there were always issues, and each person had a different trigger that prompted them to think that they had to fix it.

Ms. Guy said that they had identified all the triggers and understood their causes. She said that they needed capacity. She said that when students were sitting in the hallway to learn, it was uncomfortable due to the hard surface floor, which could make their bottoms fall asleep after 5 or 10 minutes. She said that in such situations, they could not effectively learn multiplication. She said that they needed capacity.

Ms. Halstead said that she would like to request information regarding the sales tax mentioned by Ms. Vanuch. She said that as a citizen, understanding the potential effects of a sales tax increase would be beneficial. She said that understanding these differences would help maintain consistency in the future.

Ms. Bohmke said that the Governor included a 0.9% increase in his budget for state sales tax. She said that there were numerous competing interests at play.

Ms. Gary said that Ms. Allen had informed her that she was supportive of building 18 with 19 but not at Brooke. She said that she herself would like to reiterate that she conducted a survey on this topic last year, and approximately 60% of respondents were in favor of the rate going significantly higher than it did because it was for education.

Ms. Gary said that regarding the 1% sales tax, she believed people would generally be supportive. She said that she agreed with Ms. Vanuch that they needed to be united on this, and it was crucial that they access the necessary funding. She said that she would continue to do what she could with her counterpart to grow their relationship.

Ms. Randall said that she believed it was beneficial to have these discussions as they enabled them to share their experiences and learn from each other. She said that it was her hope that when they organized exceptional programs in their schools, they could invite participants like her to join them and collaborate side by side. She said that in the past, there had been no opportunity for inviting them until after a vote had taken place. She said that she thought it would be advantageous if they could extend invitations to other organizations and events, allowing them to work together as partners and share their perspectives with one another.

Dr. Taylor said that he was also grateful for the opportunity to discuss these important issues. He said that he would like to emphasize the sensitivity regarding the timeline required to build a school, as 2028 may seem far away in today's conversation but was, in fact, a decision for this year. He said that there was much work to be done and was glad for the opportunity to address these matters. He said he appreciated her insights on these issues; they had been helpful.

Mr. Vosburg said that in Virginia, as someone wisely pointed out, their structure was designed for this kind of discussion. He said that there would inevitably be contention regarding taxation and the entire process. He said that he wanted to give his gratitude for their engagement and collaboration in working through these issues. He said that he would like to thank Dr. Taylor and his staff for their efforts. He said that they had had several meetings at the staff level, allowing both teams to work hand in hand behind the scenes.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:12 p.m., Chairman Bohmke adjourned the January 4, 2024 Joint Stafford County Board of Supervisor and Stafford County School Board work session.

Randy Vosburg

Randal E. Vosburg
County Administrator

Meg G. Bohmke

Meg Bohmke
Chairman