BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA
MINUTES
WORK SESSION
APRIL 22, 2025

CALL TO ORDER – A work session of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors was called to order by Deuntay Diggs, Chairman, at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 22, 2025 in ABC Conference Room, George L. Gordon, Jr. Government Center, 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford VA.

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

Also in attendance were William Ashton, County Administrator; Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney; Taylor Dunn, Deputy Clerk; various staff members; and other interested parties.

Dr. Yeung motioned, seconded by Mr. English, to allow Supervisor Vanuch to participate in the meeting remotely.

The Voting Board tally was:
Yea: (7) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, and Yeung
No: (0)
Absent: (0)

WORK SESSION

Mr. Diggs asked if there were any additions or deletions to the agenda.

Mr. Ashton stated that they would remove Item 2, the capital project related to the Staffordboro sidewalk. He explained that they had placed this project on tonight's meeting agenda because the Board needed to award it before April 30th, or the project would go red on the VDOT dashboard. He said that as of this afternoon, they were still waiting for the VDOT and FHWA approvals.

He said that there was nothing they could do to push them along at this point. He said that the award approval was currently with VDOT's central office, and then it would be sent to Federal Highways for final approval in the next couple of days. He said that since the project had federal funds, they needed to go through that process.

Mr. Ashton said that the VDOT deadline was April 30th to award this project and avoid being penalized, and there was a grace period dependent on a metric they were tracking for their performance development improvement plan on the VDOT dashboard. He said that they would end up going red, but they would have to deal with that.

He said that they also needed to award the project within 90 days of the bidding, which was March 19th. He said that they were paying very close attention to that. He said that they could still award after the deadline, but it would be considered behind schedule in terms of VDOT tracking metrics.

He said that as of tonight, they could not move forward, so they were pulling it.

Ms. Allen asked why they would be penalized if it was because of the state, as they could not speed up the process for the state to oversee their job.

Mr. Ashton responded that he was very familiar with this after building roads in his other job and was familiar with VDOT bureaucracy. He said that the funding arm and the review and engineering arm sometimes did not completely communicate. He said that he would be waiting on engineering review while the funding side was putting this on the red dashboards—and they did not accept the fact that they were being the hold-up as the excuse as to why they should not proceed.

Ms. Allen asked if there were an exemption that could be filed with the resident

Mr. Ashton responded that he had never been able to do that. He said that was something he had tried before, and this was extremely frustrating.

Ms. Allen stated that she was more frustrated because she did not want to waste money. She said that it was not even about the project being finished; it was just a waste of money.

Mr. Ashton said that it was more likely to penalize them for future projects, so they must be cautious, and they would work with VDOT central office as they progressed with future projects to minimize the impact. He said that he thought they also recognized the sensitivity surrounding the lack of communication between the two bureaucracies, so they would work on this through their established relationships. He added that they would need to review and finalize the agribusiness plan, and they were hopeful for May 6th.

Dr. Yeung said she would like to know more about the current dashboard. She asked if the dashboard has something to do with this project either advancing or being stalled, and whether it was currently on red.

Mr. Ashton responded that it was not on red currently. He said that they would transition to red on April 30th. He said that however, they would initiate the project soon after. He said that their red light, green light, and yellow light project matrix would not correct itself until the project was completed and thus would remain with them until the end of the project. He said that this issue was more closely related to the overall number of projects and the status of each.

He said that the performance improvement plan they were under with VDOT's central office, which he had met with a few months ago, was connected to past projects and their status, as displayed on the dashboards. He said that they were on a good pathway to improving this, and he was hopeful that they would continue to avoid red to maintain progress in that direction. He said that this project would fall to red, but they would complete it. He said that additionally, they hoped to mitigate the issues that may be present over time.

Dr. Yeung said that she did not want to air dirty laundry here, but they had been on red for a while on some of these projects, prior to Mr. Ashton's arrival, and they needed to determine which ones to take off the board if they could not complete them due to inadequate resources.

Mr. Ashton said he had worked with VDOT on that question, and the last time he met with them, they were led by Marcy Parker and her team, who were discussing how Stafford was trending in the right direction. He said that they had started to correct these, and it was disappointing that they had to take this setback right now.

Dr. Yeung asked for confirmation that they were not on any correction plan.

Mr. Ashton stated that they were under a plan, but they were progressing in the right direction.

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Mr. English, to approve the agenda as amended.

The Voting Board tally was:
Yea: (6) Allen, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, and Yeung.
No: (1) Bohmke
Absent: (0)

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. STAFFORD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS ONE-TIME FUNDING REQUESTS

Chris Fulmer, Deputy Superintendent and Chief Operating Officer for Stafford County Public Schools, said that they would discuss this item tonight and then hopefully come back on the Board's May 6 agenda for approval. He noted that a few of these items were time-sensitive. He said that they had been discussing these for a few months, including at their Joint Schools Working Committee a few weeks ago.

Mr. Fulmer said that he would start specifically with the Blackjack Road warehouse property acquisition. He stated that the schools were currently leasing a space and had been leasing it for approximately 3–4 years. He said that it was a combination of warehouse and office space used by their school nutrition, central office staff, and transportation bus driver trainers and bus attendant trainers. He stated that they had a classroom set up there for training sessions.

Mr. Fulmer said that they met onsite and did their in-class portion of the training and a behind-the-wheel session after that. He stated that they had two moderate-sized warehouses used by their school nutrition staff for bulk purchasing paper products and other items needed in school cafeterias, and they also housed furniture that they distributed to the schools.

He stated that the other side of the warehouse was primarily technology space where they imaged and repaired technology equipment. He said that last fall, the current owner was interested in selling the property, which they leased for about $125,000 a year. He stated that the owners were showing it to several potential buyers and had a deal in place, but it fell through.

Mr. Fulmer said that they were told to vacate the premises by December 31 if the deal went through. He stated that they approached the school board about pursuing the property, obtained an appraisal and facility condition assessment, and the board approved the contract pending appropriation by the Board of Supervisors. He said that they had a May 15 deadline for the contract unless they wanted to pay $50,000 to extend it.

Mr. Fulmer stated that the appraised value was $3 million. He said that the increased costs led them to question how they could build the facility and create jobs, discussing the safety aspect as a factor for using vehicles.

Mr. English said that he thought this money could be well spent towards 3R projects to get those off the table. He noted that he did not reach out to any other places for rent and did not know what he would come up with if he had.

Mr. Fulmer said that County staff was contacted for discussions about sharing space, but owning the space would allow better utilization, and installing racking systems would improve efficiency. He stated they could align peak times for bulk purchases and distribution with County needs, and flexibility in space usage would benefit both parties. He said that market research showed their current lease cost was below market prices, and they found equivalent space costing about $210,000 a year—which was $85,000 to $90,000 more than current expenses. He said they reached out to newer warehouse spaces; one had lower fees but was too large, and they were waiting to hear about subdividing it. He said expected costs would increase when leasing a smaller, needed space. He noted that they believed lease costs would rise regardless of location.

Mr. English asked if they had looked at the County Government Center and the presentation that was given.

Mr. Fulmer replied that staff had looked into that, and one of the options was actually one that he had recommended. He said that's the one that the price per square foot was less than the other markets that they had seen, but it was such a large space that even combining with the County, they wouldn't have use for that much space.

Mr. English said that he did not verify the spaces he previously discussed and just sent the information over to them. He said that there were two spots—one located down past Potomac Creek, and the other down on the other side of Route 95, where they built at North Point.

Mr. Ashton said he had sent that over with his endorsement.

Mr. Fulmer confirmed that those were the ones they looked into—both spaces—and one that was closer was a bigger space.

Mr. English said his understanding was that they would build out further if needed. He said that he was not in favor of this because 10 years from now, it would be another one of those 3R projects that they would have to maintain if they rented. He said that there were some 3R projects he would rather get those off the list, adding that the $3 million would be better spent on that approach. He said that he did not want another incident like the Rodney Thompson building pipes bursting again, and he thought it would be better to take the money and spend it well in the 3R project, and then find something to rent.

Dr. Yeung thanked Mr. Fulmer for letting her and Ms. Bohmke look at the space and ask questions. She said that she knew that at some point, they had a process, and she couldn't remember what it was called, but they had that technical review process where both the County and the staff had criteria, and they looked at what it took to take in something. She said that she didn't know what happened to that process because it used to be brought back to the Board.

She said that she believed that staff knew about this in January, and now they were in the end of April being asked to make a decision for May. She said they had different departments in this space—Bus Driver, Food/Nutrition, Technology, and the Imaging Center. She said that for the past three or four years that she was on the Board, they were still renting. She said that they didn't have all these four departments in one and asked if they were added as time went by.

Mr. Fulmer responded that the training center was in a room half the size of this one, down at transportation. He said they couldn't accommodate the growing number of bus drivers as they increased that pool, and they also couldn't hold their classes there anymore, so they had to locate them to a new space. He said that they used to have a small warehouse with no office space, across the street from the Blackjack Road warehouse, but the owner wanted to use that space differently or charge more, so they had to find new space—and that's when they moved over to this warehouse. He said that the school nutrition staff were relocated and were down at the maintenance building in a trailer, so they moved to this office space. He noted that there was no technology staff there. He explained that they were set up so that when they received big orders, they did all the imaging down there, but they were not permanently located down there.

Dr. Yeung said she was discussing $2.9 million to purchase this warehouse on Black Jack Road. She said that she knew they had purchased Cliff Farm and it was sitting there, and they ended up having to buy more land right next to Cliff Farm for Drew. She emphasized that they were not in the real estate business, and their focus should be on educating our students—not acquiring property. She said that buying this building meant less tax revenue for the County and tied up funds that could be used more directly to support capital projects.

Dr. Yeung said they already owned portable trailers, and she was wondering if those could be utilized. She said that it was worth asking if there weren't any other available properties that were better suited and more cost-effective, which was something she had mentioned to Donna Krauss. She said that since these were several departments, it wasn't necessarily all of them being in the same area, but having to operate out of the same building. She said if space were a concern, they could also temporarily consider Drew as a possible location.

Dr. Yeung said that she just thought that this decision deserved more consideration before committing to such a large purchase. She said that it may not be in the best long-term interest of the school system or the community.

Ms. Bohmke said that she had some questions, but she would ask them at the May 6 meeting.

Mr. Diggs said that he had listened to several things that Supervisor Gary had previously said. He said there was a clear lack of space, and they knew that the school division was growing. He said it was going to be more costly to rent; if he had heard Supervisor Gary correctly, around $75,000 or more. He said shutting this down and sending them somewhere else didn't seem fiscally conservative to him. He asked for confirmation that this was brought to them in March.

Mr. Ashton said it was first brought up to them in a one-on-one with the superintendent in late January or early February. He said that they asked for financials, then started bringing this forward. He said that it was their one-on-ones when they were discussing the TIF, then they proceeded to discuss it further and it kind of progressed from there.

Mr. Diggs recalled they had asked if they could co-locate, and staff had looked into that—but the schools were running out of space and didn't have many options, so he was going to support this. He said staff had done their due diligence. He said that definitely, if they could co-locate, and the County could use some of that space, that was another feather in their cap.

Mr. Fulmer said that the school system had met with the community facilities department about a week or two ago to see if there was an opportunity for them to use part of that space, possibly instead of the existing space they are currently using. He said that facilities seemed to think there was a good amount of space that they could utilize if needed moving forward.

Bryon Counsell, Chief Engineer, noted that the County and schools had undergone a space needs study starting a few years ago, which covered not only general government but also the schools to expand away from their headquarters toward remote sites. He noted that his team was not involved in the recent property at Blackjack Road, which didn't imply that the property was good or bad—it simply meant his team wasn't involved. He said the fact remains that the County and schools were running out of space, and this issue was becoming increasingly pressing.

Mr. English said if they were going to do this, it was killing two birds with one stone. He said if they could come up with a happy medium here that would satisfy the County, perhaps he would be more supportive. He added that he just didn't want to be in a situation like they were in right now, where they didn't have any clear direction and were in a bad way for space.

Mr. Fulmer said they looked at two borrowing options, which was actually where they first started, and analyzed the debt capacity. He said that for $3 million, they were looking at about $235,000 a year in debt service, including carryover money. He said if they could cash fund this, their break-even point was now less than 15 years versus 20–25 years. He said this was already in the Joint Schools Working Committee packet, so he didn't think it was anything new—and it shows projected costs each year and how those were derived. He said that even with no changes, if their rent didn't change, they would save $125,000 a year in the lease they're paying right now. However, he would also have some utility and maintenance costs, so they backed that out, and then also assumed in some of the later years those numbers go up. He said they did do the facility condition assessment, and it came back with a positive score of being in good condition.

Mr. Diggs said that he agreed with Supervisor English, but available space was not going to get any better or any cheaper in the future.

Ms. Allen asked Mr. Fulmer to provide an estimate of the property's acreage, and he confirmed that it was 1.49 acres.

Ms. Allen said the property was currently used as a storage space, but it could potentially be converted into office space and utilized in the near future. She recalled staff expressing concerns a few months ago about the costs associated with expanding County government to new facilities that would include storage and office spaces, and that was not feasible due to limited fiscal means. She asked if this space, once owned, could be repurposed and built into a new facility—a brick-and-mortar building—to expand capacity and accommodate the County's needs, potentially benefiting the schools and the County. Ms. Allen said that for example, the County may need to expand office space, and this space could be utilized for that purpose.

Mr. Fulmer responded that they hadn't done a deep analysis into that, so he didn't want to speak in definitive terms. He said that once you owned a property, it provided more flexibility for use. He said they had been limiting their investment in the property because it was just leased, so they didn't want to turn around and spend a lot of money then be facing the situation they're in now where they had to leave and lose that investment. He said they could either enhance the warehouse space they had now and make better use of it or close it in and use it for other space.

Ms. Allen asked how many buildings could be built on that one 1.5-acre site

Mr. Fulmer said he did not think they would be adding more buildings to that current space.

Mr. English said there was a business already in the back of that building, a garage with a two-bay facility. He said the County garage needed space, and he knew it would be a smart thing to keep renting to the current tenant to help pay expenses. He asked about perhaps alleviating some of the pressure of maintenance on County vehicles and have them worked on there.

Mr. Fulmer said he had been looking into that, and the gentleman who currently leases the space had about two and a half years left but had communicated that he was thinking about getting out of the business at the end of that lease. Mr. Fulmer said they had already started some discussions on whether they would expand warehouse space since it was already set up, especially if he wanted to leave his lifts and equipment in there. He noted that the space was more of a pull-through bay, which could be used for two vehicles, and there would not be a bus and lifts in that space. He noted that the fleet garage had bays that were currently used for SUVs, cars, and sheriff's vehicles, and shifting to this site would free up that space for buses. He said that they looked at this as a short-term solution because the fleet facility garage wasn't included in the CIP for several years, so this would at least buy them some time.

Mr. Fulmer said that the Drew Middle School budget was part of the CIP approved last week. He said that he and Jason Towery had met with the Board of Supervisors in a closed session last fall to discuss land options and provide an update on specific pieces of land they were considering.

He said that they have since entered into a contract on land in front of Cliff Farm, subject to Board of Supervisors approval, along with the Comp Plan review and other contingencies.

He said that the contract had a June 1st deadline, and they were working with the seller to mutually agree to extend this deadline, with other conditions tied to the deadline that they were working on with the seller. He said they wanted to extend the deadline but also wanted to secure the appropriation for the land funds so they could purchase the property once all other conditions were met. He said this appropriation was specifically for the Drew Middle School rebuild. As previously presented, he said this site was closer to Leland Road than the existing Cliff Farm site, and it was cheaper to build on due to the topography and utility requirements. He said they had chosen this site specifically because of these factors. He said that they had held community meetings and spoken with the neighbors at this site, as well as sharing site plans with the School Board, and the site was scheduled to come before the Board of Supervisors on May 6th.

Dr. Yeung said that everyone knew Drew had always been at her heart as the middle school, the school that she had wanted built even before the elementary school because it was so needed. She said that she was very happy that they were here, and her only concern was that the children who lived right across the street and were able to cross the street would be able to get to the new school. She said they were planning on relocating them to another middle school, and she believed those children deserved the opportunity to attend the new school.

Mr. Fulmer said they directed the land search for Drew Middle School to examine the current attendance zone, so that the benefits of the new school could be retained for the students and citizens in that area. He said that the current attendance zone was found to be within the Drew zone. He said that he could not predict what those boundaries would look like in the future, as a redistricting process would be undertaken. He said that the Drew Middle School rebuild and would add over 400 seats, so it was likely that the Drew attendance zone would expand, attracting more students who were outside of the current zone. He said that his assumption was that those students would attend this school as well, if they were located at the current Drew site. He said that like all students, they would receive transportation to and from school.

Dr. Yeung said that during her visit to the school, she provided assistance, even when she was a member of the School Board and later on this Board. She said she was surprised that they did not add a wing and extend the day school back to Drew, rather than relocating it to Rising Star. She said that instead, they are now stating that they want to retain the day school with Rising Star. She said she was informed that they did not initially want to include the day school with the younger children, so she was unclear about their current stance and wondered what the plan was for the day school if it was to be removed from Drew immediately.

Mr. Fulmer said that the current plan was that they would still use the Drew location, and he wanted to preface once again that they were working on contingency plans for what the Drew or the day school location and setup would be when the new Drew was built. He said that the current plan on a short-term basis was to have the Drew day school still exist at its current location at Drew, even when they moved those middle school students out. He said that they did not want that to be a long-term solution, and they were looking at the financial implications of doing that and how easily they could keep that wing of the school open.

He said that it was originally aligned with adding a wing to Rising Star when it was built, so they would not necessarily have two separate wings that were sharing common space when they rebuilt the middle school, or at the Rising Star space. He said that perhaps a single or common area front entrance with a common cafeteria area would be a good option. He said that they could share a kitchen space, then to the left was Rising Star and to the right was the day school, with the ability to expand the day school. He said that as far as a contingency with the Hartwood Elementary School rebuild, if they had a catastrophic failure of the Drew building in the short term, they could relocate the Drew day school to the Hartwood building on a short-term basis.

Ms. Bohmke said she wanted to inform everyone, especially since she would not be here next year, that a rezoning had been done on the property across from Drew Middle School. She said that there were single-family townhomes located there, and a rezoning had been done on that property in 2012-2013, or perhaps as early as 2000, by her predecessor. She said that if the developer came in and wanted to build new homes there, the existing residents would have to be relocated. She said that it would be a challenge because they did not have a sufficient amount of housing that would meet their needs. Ms. Bohmke said that she had contacted Planning and Zoning. She said that she emailed or called them periodically and asked if they had any information from this developer, but they were not responding.

Mr. Diggs said that he had mentioned to his counterpart, Ms. Randall, that he too would have liked to have seen Drew or the day school stay with Drew and add a wing. He said that based on everything they knew about Drew Middle School, he did not think it was anyone's place to stay there, and he would not want to put staff in there either. He said he tried to stay in his lane and leave the School Board decisions to them, but he felt like they were missing an opportunity there.

Mr. Fulmer said moving back to one-time carryover funds, when Dr. Smith was working on the FY26 budget, they knew that the County was going to be in a tough financial position and could not afford to put in recurring costs for Chromebooks. He said that they purchased most of the Chromebooks in 2020 and 2021 with COVID and other federal funding—some of which came directly to the schools, and some coming to the County then allocated to the school division. He said they have hit the point where those Chromebooks have replaced a lot of textbooks, so they have cut back on textbook costs but now face costs for the technology to access the materials.

He said that the proposal from staff was to use their one-time carryover money again toward the Chromebooks. He said that this would be applied across the division to the oldest Chromebooks, not targeting a specific grade or grade level. He said that Chromebooks not only get old and break but also have a maintenance life cycle where they are no longer supported, which means they cannot be used for required SOL testing.

Mr. Fulmer said they also have desktop classroom computers that teachers have access to, and a similar situation with them being very old computers that are no longer able to support Windows upgrades. He said that in October of 2025, they are going to have to come offline, so about $700,000 of the $3.1 million one-time money is going toward the classroom computers, with the rest going toward student Chromebooks. He said that this would be presented to the Board in early March for final approval on how they are going to allocate those funds toward technology.

Ms. Bohmke said she knew originally that the Chromebooks were being used by elementary, middle, and high school students. She said that she believed that elementary now was two students to one Chromebook, and she wanted to know who was really using them now. She recalled that she was the one who really pushed for these Chromebooks when she was the chair of the Board during the COVID-19 pandemic, and she contacted the superintendent at the time.

Mr. Fulmer said he appreciated that support and confirmed that they currently have them available through all grade levels. He said that some middle school students took them home, and the high school students were permitted to take them home, but all Chromebooks for elementary students stayed in the schools and were not allowed to be taken home at all.

Ms. Bohmke said that Finland, which is very educationally savvy, had decided that Chromebooks and a lot of these computers were not good for the students' brains. She said that she knew Dr. Chase was doing an event on Thursday night over at Howe Library as it related to this and how it was impacting their students' brains. Ms. Bohmke asked if the $700,000 they were using to replace the ones in the classrooms was for elementary, middle, and high school.

Mr. Fulmer said that amount was actually not for Chromebooks, but for desktop computers that were used to project on the screens during the actual class period, across all levels. He said that it was about 1,600 units, but it was only for the ones that had been purchased that were so old they no longer would support Windows 11, adding that those units would essentially cease to function in November of 2025.

Ms. Gary commented that it was really an exchange of resources with textbooks that they're no longer using, because books are very expensive so it pretty much levels out. She asked whether there was a cost differential.

Mr. Fulmer responded that it could vary from year to year, depending on what textbook adoptions they had. He said that a lot of resources were online educational resources, which were free, then students could access them from Chromebook. He said that some AP classes and a few CTE classes might require some form of textbook, so they still had to have hard-copy textbooks but he was not able to provide an exact amount. He said if they had to switch back to textbooks this year, the one-time investment would far exceed the initial investment, and they still had to have textbook readoption and replacements that could total several million dollars per year.

Ms. Gary said Supervisor Bohmke made a good point, but this was all contextualized. She said that she actually liked that the kids didn't bring the Chromebooks home in elementary school, which was beneficial for the longevity of the devices and also for students' lives. She said it annoyed her when one of her sons was always on video games, but now he was a drone pilot.

Mr. English asked about available insurance coverage available in the event a student damaged the devices, and whether parents perhaps paid $10 a year or so for that.

Mr. Fulmer said that there was a warranty, so they could send it back and get the repairs done; otherwise, they did the repairs in house. He said that if the Chromebook broke during normal use, they would not charge, but if it was intentionally damaged or the charger was lost, they did charge the parents.

Dr. Yeung noted that the IT department had grown significantly due to increased technology use.

Mr. Fulmer said they had added a handful of staff over the last five years. He said he was aware with one or two network techs who were using some grant money to start with, just to help with the deployment of the Chromebooks and the repairs, then they had to continue that need once that grant money ran out. He added that this was the case several years ago.

Dr. Yeung said that while on the School Board, she recalls other schools handing out laptops during COVID and implementing “internet cafés.” She said that she gave it that name simply so anyone who needed help could come to the library and access the internet and get help from the librarian or any available teacher. She said she is understanding that every child, including the elementary schools, has a Chromebook. She said middle school students also have a Chromebook to take home, but she is not sure if it’s a one-to-one ratio in the school system.

Mr. Fulmer said that it was roughly a one-to-one, with classroom sets at the elementary level. He said they did not issue a specific Chromebook to each student, as they did not take one home.

Dr. Yeung said she was not going to ask about the cost of maintaining all the Chromebooks before and after COVID, but she did know that it was a significant expense. Dr. Yeung said she was also not going to discuss Finland because the majority of individuals in Finland were not diverse. She said that coming from the Netherlands, she knew her children did not have access to television, and she was concerned about ensuring students here could complete their homework or work without being distracted by television or computers. She said that this was a responsibility that fell on parents, and it did not matter whether you had a Chromebook or not.

Dr. Yeung said the current concern was that when you compared textbooks to online materials, they needed to be cautious about not creating an imbalance because the distribution centers were now taking advantage of this situation. She said that when textbooks were removed, they were increasing prices. She added that she would like to know the amount of money they were spending on online materials when you must purchase them individually. She also wondered if the Kajeets she had secured from Verizon were still in use.

Mr. Fulmer said they still had some Kajeets that were issued, and they obviously ramped that up during COVID—but then it was reined back in.

Dr. Yeung said she was unsure if the Chromebook investment was a sustainable investment, but that was for them all to decide. She said that she was looking at it from a different lens and from a different world view. Dr. Yeung said she believed that the middle schoolers and the high schoolers would benefit from it, but she was unsure what the purpose was for middle schoolers and younger students to be on computers and take them home if they did not have to.

Mr. Diggs said he supports the Chromebooks but did have the same concerns that Supervisor Bohmke raised in terms of the technology and the exposure and the formation of the brain—but the schools are supposed to be preparing the kids for the future, and technology is here to stay. He added that he still likes to hold hard-copy books.

2. CAPITAL PROJECTS TRANSPORTATION; CONSIDER AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR TO EXECUTE A CONTRACT WITH M & F CONCRETE, INC. FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE STAFFORDBORO SIDEWALK PROJECT PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-97

This item was not discussed.

3. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT; CONSIDER APPROVING OF THE EDA'S ISSUANCE OF TAX EXEMPT REVENUE BONDS FOR ENGLISH OAKS APARTMENT (APRIL HOUSING), AN EXISTING AFFORDABLE HOUSING SENIOR COMMUNITY LOCATED IN THE FALMOUTH DISTRICT PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-115

Mr. Diggs said proposed resolution R25-115 was consideration for approving the EDA’s issuance of tax-exempt revenue bonds for English Oaks Apartment, April Housing, and the existing affordable housing senior community located in the Falmouth District.

Liz Barber, Director of Economic Development, said she was before the Board as the staff liaison to the Economic Development Authority. Ms. Barber thanked the EDA chair, Jack Rowley, and EDA member, Frank Pacelli, for being there in support of this request.

Ms. Barber said the EDA had wished to pursue a bond request by April Housing, a company that manages an existing Stafford County affordable housing senior community called English Oaks, located in the Falmouth District. Ms. Barber said that she had presented this project concept to the full Board at their March 18 meeting. Although no vote had been taken at that meeting, she said, supervisors Bohmke and Young had requested the opportunity to meet with April Housing staff to review the project budget in detail, ask questions, and discuss the impact on residents.

Ms. Barber said that a follow-up meeting had occurred on April 4, and she had provided the full project budget breakdown and put that into their packets for review. She said they had been able to answer questions and discuss the project breakdown; since then, the EDA held a public hearing on April 11, as was required by Virginia Code. Ms. Barber said there had been no attendees to speak in regard to the public hearing, and the EDA had passed a resolution with a vote of 6 to 0. She said they had passed that resolution to issue the qualified residential bonds to assist April Housing in financing the costs of rehabilitating and equipping English Oaks.

Ms. Barber said that the resolution being proposed and presented for Board action aligns with Virginia Code, and formal action is requested of the Board today with that resolution. Ms. Barber said that the item was time-sensitive, so it would require the Board to waive the bylaws since the Board would have to apply to the Virginia Housing Authority no later than April 30.

Ms. Bohmke asked what the next deadline was if they did not meet the April 30th deadline.

Ms. Barber said that she understood it to be an annual application through the Virginia Housing Authority. She noted that April housing staff were present to answer any additional questions, but this was something that had been discussed since the beginning of December.

Mr. Paul Brown, a consultant to April Housing for English Oaks, said that the application for the bond volume cap had two guaranteed application rounds each year, one in January and one in April. He said that due to the size of the request, they had to go for the April round. He said that if the bonds were not all allocated, there was a possibility that sometime this summer, there may be a third round. He said that given recent history, it seemed unlikely that all the bonds would not be spoken for. He said if not, the next opportunity would be April 2026.

Ms. Bohmke said that she wanted to understand why something was time-sensitive before that onus was placed on the Board. She said that when she examined the flow of funds for the project, she appreciated that the board had met with Dr. Young and her to discuss the project, and she believed it was a worthy project as those constituents deserved to have their homes renovated. She said that as the Board knew, they would be displaced for two to three weeks and moved to another site where they would have a kitchenette for their eating needs, and the board would be taking care of all their other needs as well. She said that her question was regarding the flow of funds, as the Commonwealth of Virginia was putting in $32 million on this project.

Joseph Baclit from April Housing said the bond request was $32–$32.5 million, as the upper tier. He said that once they advanced their underwriting through the closing process, they would likely need less than that. He said they just wanted to make sure in this resolution, they had the upper reach to request more than they needed, and the request would likely be $26–$28 million.

Mr. Brown explained that tax-exempt bonds are authorized by federal law, and each state received a certain pot of money they could allocate to issue tax-exempt bonds. He said these were just authority-to-issue bonds that were exempt from federal tax, so the state was not actually issuing any money and the County was not lending any money.

Ms. Bohmke said she wanted to confirm this for the public's sake and wanted to ensure that the state wasn't on the hook for anything because that would be taxpayer dollars—whether they're talking local, state, or federal, it's still taxpayer dollars. She said that she noticed on the document that the developer fee was approximately $4 million. She said that the developer explained to her how that fee was justified, as well as how it would be split out with other consultants and providers. She said that it was a normal fee in this industry. She said that because they didn't issue these bonds very often, she was trying to understand the complexity here.

Mr. Baclit responded that the fee was set by Virginia Housing in their Qualified Allocation Plan, and this was the fee that the developer would receive to cover their overhead and profit margin, as well as their consultant fees from Joseph Brown Development Associates. He said they were actually deferring the majority of that fee. He said the capitalized amount they took at closing was a small portion, and the deferred amount was paid over the lifespan of the project through Project NOI, which was an unusual deferment. He said that developers were usually driven to receive as much of that developer fee up front as possible, but their business model as an affordable housing developer was different, which allowed them to defer it.

Ms. Bohmke said that she appreciated the explanation because she didn't see anything in the Board packets about that. She thanked them for spending time to explain a lot of the Board's questions and outline all the soft costs, interior, and exterior grounds maintenance. She asked if they had already applied for it or received the federal grant funding.

Mr. Baclit said this project would not be pursuing any federal grant funding; it would be funded by tax-exempt bonds coupled with federal tax credits. He said that the tax credit application was submitted in January, and Virginia Housing had been reviewing that but would not act upon it until they submitted their bond application. He said that the Economic Development Authority would be submitting the bond application at the end of the month, which would be by April 30th.

Dr. Yeung asked if the pricing in the document had been locked in yet.

Mr. Baclit responded that in terms of pricing for construction costs, those would remain stable until closing. He said that they were going to be working in lockstep with their general contractor to receive updates frequently, and while the cost might fluctuate, it should stay in that range.

Ms. Vanuch said she did not have an issue with this particular project, but she did have an issue with it being brought forward on the agenda as an item that they were supposed to take action on at a work session. She stated that they had all agreed, even in their bylaws, that they were not taking action in work sessions. She said that she would not be supporting anything moving forward in this work session because the item did not have public comment and conflicted with their bylaws and meeting structure. She said that she understood the time issues, but there should have been a special meeting called where there was public comment advertised and allowed.

Mr. Diggs asked for confirmation that there had also been an EDA meeting related to the proposed development plan.

Ms. Barber said that the EDA had held a public hearing, which was required.

Mr. Diggs commented that no one had attended the public hearing, which was advertised, so the normal process was followed. He asked Ms. McClendon to address the issue of the bylaws and the meeting structure.

Ms. McClendon read from the board's bylaws, Section 4.11 E. She said that for day C work session items, "The Board shall not take a formal vote or action on any item during the work session unless two-thirds of the board deemed the matter time sensitive." Ms. McClendon said that once an item had been covered at a day C work session item, the item may come back to the Board under action item or consent on day A. She said that that provision basically provided that it was not the normal course of action to vote on items at a work session. She said that it did provide, however, that when the Board found a matter time sensitive, it was appropriate for them to vote on a work session item in a day C work session, like they were having today.

Ms. Vanuch said she understood that, but it did go against their bylaws. She said that it went against the way they structured these meetings because they were taking a vote, they were asking them to waive their bylaws, to vote for it to be time sensitive, to take action on it, and to meet a deadline that could have been circumvented in other ways. She said that she had a real problem with continuing to use these work sessions in a way that they were not intended.

Ms. Gary said she did not see an issue with this, as it sounds as though all the processes had been done with complete transparency. She said that she is grateful for that because it makes her job easier that the proper course had been followed. Ms. Gary said that she thought this item was incredibly important and was time sensitive. She said that she did not want to get hung up on procedure, as they have the flexibility to waive the bylaws, and this would not be against the that. She said that it was just an opportunity to do something a little bit different.

Ms. Bohmke said she was going to read the section that the County Attorney had read. She said that for the record, she had a conversation with the Chair on Sunday night and told him that she was opposed to this meeting being held, because when they established their bylaws last August, they specifically said that the C day would be for work sessions. She emphasized that their bylaws state this was specifically for complex issues—data centers, solar facilities, large-scale solar, and things like that—and the items they're voting on tonight are not complex items. She said she was very candid with the Chair that she thought they needed to readvertise this meeting.

Ms. Bohmke said that this particular project could have been presented at their April 15 meeting, and she asked why it wasn't on the agenda in front of the public. She said that this is all about transparency and she's not happy to be here tonight because she doesn't believe this is a regular meeting, and they changed their schedule back in August for a reason. She said that she is not going to waive their bylaws, and she rarely waives the bylaws unless it is time-sensitive for something at the dais.

Ms. Bohmke further stated that she's in support of this project and knows there are sufficient votes to probably support this, which is great. She said that she's not going to make a motion because she is not happy that they're discussing the School Board item, which is a very controversial issue, then bring it back to the May 6th meeting—and because the public thinks the Board is just having a work session tonight, they've missed it. She said that they've missed a lot of the questions that were asked today of Mr. Fulmer, which she thinks is wrong. She said that she will be abstaining from this item, and she will not be supporting waiving their bylaws because this is not a bona fide work session with complex issues.

Mr. English said that they had a public hearing on April 11, so there was no way it could have gotten to them on the 15th.

Ms. Barber said that it was published on the 11th.

Mr. English said that he did not blame anyone because he thought when it first came to them, it was at the beginning and all the questions were asked. He said that they could have voted on it that night, but Supervisor Bohmke and Supervisor Yeung wanted to go back and ask questions. He said that he heard what was being said about losing the bylaws, but if it was time sensitive, he was going to have to support this because he was thinking of the seniors and he didn't want to lose this opportunity. Mr. English said that he was supporting the change to the bylaws, and he thought this was a special issue because it was dealing with the seniors. He asked for confirmation that after they gave them the green light, they were going to have a public hearing.

Ms. Barber said that she sat down with County administration to come up with the best timeline to provide information, and part of why they came back in March was that they were trying to build that relationship again and continue to build it between the EDA and the Board. She said that they did not want to come to the Board and dump all this information on them, expecting them to have an answer at the same time and be surprised by what was being provided. She said that this timeline was thought out, although it was not the most ideal, but it was something that County administration suggested made the most sense to be able to help as much as they could.

Dr. Yeung said that she considers this a complex issue. She said that housing was a problem, and the fact that they had 118 units—and 118 individuals that were going to be displaced—was on her mind. She said that they were talking about older people and their mental health, so it could be disturbing to them to plan to move and then have that plan altered. Dr. Yeung said that she was going to make a motion to waive the bylaws to allow this to move forward.

Mr. Diggs said he wanted to remind everyone that they also had work sessions on B days, and on B-days, they could take action as well.

Ms. Bohmke said she had called Mr. Diggs, who understood her concern and had said that one of the issues they would face with moving this forward was people's availability. Mr. Diggs said that he knew at least two Supervisors were not available, and then they ran into the April 30th timeframe.

Mr. Diggs said that when they talked about transparency and communication he thought they needed to go back as a Board and have some conversations because he thought there was a difference between intent and expectations—and there was some crossing of mindsets of how it used to be. Mr. Diggs said he did not think anybody was trying to do anything nefarious here, they were just trying to ensure they supported this project, which was an amazing project.

Ms. Bohmke said that in the future, she would recommend that either staff or the Board Chair reach out to Board members and send them an email as a courtesy. She said that when she looked at the agenda on Friday night—she always reviewed it on a Friday when it became public—she saw that they were just doing regular business at this work session. She said that she was really upset, and either staff or the Chair needed to inform the Board as a courtesy if this was going to occur. She added that she did not think it was fair they were going into a work session where they were going to be asking to waive the bylaws, and they should have a courtesy notice.

Ms. Allen recalled the Board retreat when they decided to change the meeting structure. She said one of the reasons that option C existed in the bylaws was because they contemplated what would happen in a work session if they had time-sensitive matters that needed to be addressed that staff couldn't bring to A or B workday. She said that they literally put in a provision for this in the event something like this happened, and then now they're complaining about doing that. She said that this was counterintuitive and not productive. She said that to say that something had not been done transparently, that meant that they didn't remember the conversations they had, because literally they talked about that and addressed it. She said that was why it was worded the way it was, to give them that flexibility. She said that if not, it wouldn't exist.

Ms. Allen said the second issue is that they would have voted on this in March, as Mr. English said, because she remembered being prepared to vote on it—but they were asked to push it back to allow for some members to have further questions. She said that she was confused about how this was not transparent. She said that lastly, every one of their calendar dates had been noticed since January. She said that to say that the public was unaware of their meeting dates was not accurate, as they had members of the public here. She added that the video was also available online, but every one of their dates had been detailed since January when they voted on them.

She said she had been supportive of this project since it came forward in March and would be supportive of it now because, as Mr. English, Dr. Yeung, Ms. Gary, and the Chairman had said, this was a time-sensitive project because it required improvement for seniors from a handicapped perspective, meaning functional ADLs, and also because it saved money. She said that she didn't see what the nuance or the issue was. She said that it wasn't something that the County was sitting there opening up their wallets and saying let's just give away taxpayer dollars. She said that they were just the medium. She asked the Chair to call the vote.

Dr. Yeung motioned, seconded by Ms. Allen, to approve R25-115.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (5) Diggs, English, Gary, Yeung, and Allen
No: (0)
Abstain: (1) Bohmke and Vanuch

4. UTILITIES; CONSIDER AUTHORIZING AN APPLICATION FOR A GRANT/LOAN THROUGH THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH FOR CONSTRUCTION RELATED TO REHABILITATION AND SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS AT SMITH LAKE WATER TREATMENT FACILITY; PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-111

Mr. Edwards stated that they were currently looking at two major projects at the Smith Lake Water Plant. He said the first project had been upgraded—essential systems including chemical, electrical, and HVAC—to ensure the facility remained compliant with regulations. He said that the second project had been enhanced, which was the treatment process and installed treatment to remove PFAS due to new regulations. He said that these projects had been relatively expensive endeavors, and to help with funding, they were looking at grant and loan opportunities, with the first being through the Virginia Department of Health's Drinking Water Revolving Loan Fund. He said that it was a loan, but there was the chance for principal forgiveness, especially for any type of PFAS projects. He said that this was going to be a time-sensitive request, and they were going to ask the Board to make this request as soon as possible. He said that they would apply for the loan opportunity that was due by May 2nd.

Mr. English asked why this was so time-sensitive and why it had been brought up tonight.

Mr. Edwards responded that he made the decision to apply for it in late March, and they were originally looking at bringing it to the April 15th meeting. He said they knew there was going to be an April 22nd meeting. He said that they knew that the 15th was going to be relatively full, and his understanding was that the meeting went until 1:30 in the morning. He stated that since they knew they had the opportunity to present it on the 22nd, they elected to do that.

Dr. Yeung motioned, seconded by Ms. Gary, to waive their bylaws and deem this time-sensitive so they could consider this item.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (5) Diggs, English, Gary, Yeung, and Allen
No: (2) Bohmke and Vanuch
Abstain: (0)
Absent: (0)

Ms. Vanuch left the meeting at 6:25 p.m.

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Dr. Yeung, to approve R25-111.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (5) Diggs, English, Gary, Yeung, and Allen
No: (0)
Abstain: (1) Bohmke
Absent: (1) Vanuch

Mr. Edwards reported that another grant opportunity became available last year at the end of April through the Department of Defense. He said that the Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP) is a grant that supports various projects, and this particular grant is focused on a water project that enhances military readiness. He said that as the County supplies water to Quantico, there is a direct connection, and the County intends to submit an application. He said that for this year, the County planned to pursue the overall upgrade project; next year, the County aimed to address the PFAS upgrades as part of the grant opportunity.

Ms. Allen asked whether this would come back on consent, because she didn't want to face a situation where the Board said they needed to have a work session or anything for this.

Mr. Edwards responded that if they were applying for it, probably either the second meeting in May or the second meeting in June.

ADJOURNMENT

The Board adjourned its meeting at 6:30 p.m.

William H. Ashton, II
County Administrator