



www.sovanow.com

Weather

Partly cloudy today and Friday, with highs rising from the low 80s to 90. The weekend will be hot and muggy with highs in the low 90s.

NEWS & RECORD

50¢

Thursday
June 17, 2021

Volume 153 Issue 48

SERVING SOUTH BOSTON AND HALIFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA SINCE 1869

Trustees run into staff crunch, failed land deal

By TOM McLAUGHLIN
News & Record Staff

Testy meeting yields impasse on HCHS, no path forward on pay

Halifax County School Board trustees took little action but laid bare sharp divisions in their June monthly meeting Monday night at the middle school.

The one major action board members did take was to reject a proposal by Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mark Lineburg to purchase some 12 acres of land next to Halifax County High School for a negotiated price of \$360,000. Scott Worner, the ad-

ministration's point person on the high school modernization project, explained that the land would be needed under either scenario for improving HCHS — building an all-new facility or renovating the existing structure.

The School Board split 4-4 on a motion by ED-2 trustee Roy Keith Lloyd to purchase the property, leading to its defeat. Motions that end in ties on the eight-member board fail.

The aborted purchase of the land, known as the Powell property, was one major point of contention among trustees. There were others — arguments over how to handle a worsening situation with personnel, especially teachers who are leaving Halifax County Public Schools; and what to do about HCPS employees who have not gotten vaccinated for COVID-19.

Some arguments spilled over

into others, most starkly when trustees wrangled over what to do about teacher compensation and setting a path forward on the high school.

"This is not normal"

Assistant Superintendent Valdevia Hall, who also serves as HCPS director of human resources, spoke shortly after trustees voted down the purchase of the Powell property. She laid out

a looming problem for the school division — a depleted workforce, especially in the teaching ranks.

With 17 teachers retiring, other leaving for higher-paying jobs elsewhere, some teachers getting out of the profession altogether, and more employees expected to depart in July, Halifax County Public Schools has a real problem. "It is very concerning," said Hall.

"We have been working very hard to fill the positions," she

See TRUSTEES, page A12

THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 2021

THE NEWS & RECORD ■ SOUTH BOSTON/HALIFAX COUNTY, VA.

THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 2021

THE I



The high school bus parking lot, with the Powell property at left.

TRUSTEES

From page A1

said, explaining that HCPS has expanded its recruitment efforts by advertising openings on multiple platforms, contacting colleges and universities and other school divisions, and participating in job recruitment fairs. The school division also has posted dozens of openings on its website, with more than 70 openings listed this weekend.

"The vacancies that you've seen in the past month and this month, that is not normal. This is not normal," said Hall. "Please keep in mind, we have had a very challenging year with COVID-19, for all our employees — top to bottom. Everybody has been impacted in some way."

In exit interviews with departing teachers, Hall said she has heard many reasons for why people are leaving — standard causes such as relocations and, for teachers who travel to Halifax County for work, finding new jobs closer to home. Some teachers expressed frustrations at a perceived lack of support from administration and discipline issues in the classroom.

But other statements by outgoing teachers speak to conditions that have been exacerbated by the pandemic — the desire to work from home rather than in a classroom, the burdensome demands of covid education, and the chance to earn better pay teaching in nearby schools outside Halifax County.

"There are a variety of reasons people are leaving," said Hall, and "we're trying to fill [vacancies] as quick as we can. And we're trying to get the best qualified people also."

Lloyd, the ED-2 trustee, said Halifax County has enjoyed high retention rates among employees over the past three years and asked Hall to confirm whether his understanding was correct. She said it was.



ED-2 trustee Lloyd, from a prior meeting. Below, HCHS.

"We're hoping this is just going to be an exceptional year. Like I said, this is not the norm. It's not normal," Hall replied.

ED-3 trustee Sandra Garner-Coleman said she had heard the quality of applicants for Halifax County openings was not great, citing an unspecified source who told her the top-ranked candidates for county school jobs scored a 2.5 on a scale from 1 to 5, from lowest- to highest-qualified. Garner-Coleman said the situation was a reflection of the low salaries being offered to Halifax County teachers.

"People need to understand that teachers need to be paid, too, and they are going to migrate to areas where they can earn more money," she said.

Garner-Coleman then returned to a point that had been settled only moments earlier with the tie vote to reject the purchase of the Powell property next to the high school. She was part of the bloc that voted to go forward with the acquisition, joined by Lloyd, Freddie Edmunds (ED-5), and Walter Potts (ED-8). Voting "no" were Board Chair Kathy Fraley (ED-1), Vice Chair Todd Moser (ED-6), Jay Camp (ED-4) and Keith McDowell (ED-7).

"It's a sad day in Halifax County," said Garner-Coleman, "because we have board members that do not want to see us have a state-of-the-art high school ... We want to promote academic excellence and we have people who do not want to promote that."

She continued, "I do not want to put our county down, but we need to enlarge our economic base. We're not going to attract businesses that want to come [when] they go into that high school and see the condition that it is in ... When their children get beyond the elementary level, they might stay here and go to the middle school, but when it is time to hit that high school, they are getting out of here."

"It is a sad day when we do not recognize that education is the pillar that holds up a community," Garner-Coleman added that by delaying action on the high school, trustees will "squander that sales tax money" with construction costs rising with each passing month. "I guess we'll send [that money] back to the state, because poor little Halifax County does not want it, because we don't want a quality high school for our children."

"It's disgusting," she said.

Moser lashes out

Her comments drew an angry retort from Moser, who told Garner-Coleman, "You can't tell me these board members here don't want the same things you want." After brief crosstalk between the two, Moser laid out his primary reason for voting against the high school land acquisition: "For me to sit here and put all our money into a high school, that'll never happen. All I can tell you is get me off the board. Because we've got to have [upgrades] to elementary schools just as much as we have to have the high school."

"It makes no sense for us to take 130 million dollars and put it into one school," continued Moser, "when we got other schools in this county that were built in the 1960s that do not have air conditioning, does not have heat ..."

"They do not have heat, do not have air conditioning," interrupted Garner-Coleman, correcting his grammar.

"Does not, do not," replied Moser, repeating his point: "But they don't."

Moser noted the sales tax referendum was presented to county voters as a way to avoid having to raise property taxes to pay for new school facilities, and "if taxpayer dollars have to go up, I'd much rather see them go up to pay our teachers, who can teach our kids regardless of the condition of our schools."

Camp, speaking moments later, offered a similar rationale for his vote against purchasing the property. Waving around the School Board's goals action plan in his hand, Camp mentioned the first two items on the list — preparing students for future careers and setting high standards for student learning and full accreditation. "That's what teachers give us," he said.

"Teachers have been put upon this last year," Camp continued. "That's why I voted no [on the land purchase], I'd like to see the money going to compensation, okay, for teachers, because this is a once-in-a-lifetime year they've had. They've had a heckuva year, too, and they deserve everything I'm going to try to give them."

Camp said that trustees, rather than get mad at each other, should realize "who we got to get mad at — the State of Virginia. We've got to go back to Richmond and get one more penny on that [sales] tax" to increase school employee pay. (The penny tax approved by county voters in 2019 is specifically earmarked



ED-4 trustee Camp

for school facility needs.)

"We're losing half of our English department at our high school. Guess what? ... That affects our accreditation, and they're walking out the door. They're walking out the door," Camp said, holding aloft the list of School Board goals as he spoke.

Recalling the motto of late high school JROTC 1st Sgt. Gregory Scott — "Too easy" — Camp told fellow board members, "How hard is it to go see [Del. James Edmunds and say, 'James, I'll go up there with you [to Richmond] and ask for one more penny. How easy is that? That's what the First Sergeant would say — how easy is that?'"

Jeffress and Garner-Coleman respond: That's your plan?

Before Camp spoke, Garner-Coleman and ED-5 trustee Edmunds addressed the reasons that Moser and, later, Camp, gave for voting against the Powell property purchase, and sought to punch holes in the logic.

Garner-Coleman, addressing Moser directly, pushed back at the idea that a decision on the high school must await resolution of issues involving the elementary schools. "Dr. Lineburg has worked up a plan [of action] inclusive of the elementary schools, the high school and a compensation package, and he has given due diligence to that plan," she said, adding, "If you don't know, I've worked here for 25 years and he's the best superintendent to ever hit this county" — drawing a nod of agreement from Moser.

"He works endless hours putting together proposals, and Dr. Worner does the same thing," Garner-Coleman continued, "and they'll come in here and lay it all out, and the man with authority [says] 'No! No! I mean, that's your decision.'"

Edmunds jumped in, pointing out that the vote to purchase the Powell property is not a vote to build a new high school, since the land would be needed under

either option for HCHS — an all-new facility, which could cost anywhere from \$100 million to \$130 million, or extensive renovations to the high school, the cost of which was pegged at around \$73 million to \$88 million two years ago, depending on the study.

Worner, in his presentation early in the meeting, laid out two possible uses for the Powell property, which fronts Halifax Road between the high school and the Quality Gas station, better known as the Gas House.

If the county decides to build a new school, the land could form a portion of the building footprint, Worner said. If the county chooses to renovate the existing building, the site would be useful as a staging area for heavy construction equipment, with a portion set aside for student parking.

Either way, pointed out Edmunds, it makes little sense to spurn the chance to acquire the land when it could always be sold off or marketed by the county to potential businesses if the School Board decides it is not essential for modernizing the high school.

"If necessary, you can turn the land back over to the county, turn it over to the IDA, let them make some money off of it if we don't use it," said Edmunds.

If the county goes the lower-cost renovation route, it will need the property for a number of reasons. Worner laid out a sequence of changes that would result with renovation: classes would be held in trailers set up at the school bus parking lot, school bus parking would shift to the existing student lot, and students could park in a portion of the newly acquired acreage. The rest of the land would be used to house heavy construction equipment and building materials.

Without the extra land, Edmunds asked, what's the plan for renovating HCHS while students remain at the high school campus, lacking feasible options for an alternative high school site?

"You talk about safety — we want to make sure that equipment doesn't hurt our children when we renovate the high school," Edmunds said, explaining the importance of having a building staging area. He added, "I hope we got another plan — because right now you know you're gonna do something with the high school."

"Now you've got to decide where are you going to put all those school buses at, where are you going to have the parents drop the kids off, where are you going to set the tents up, where you're going to do all that stuff at," Edmunds said.

"Right now the whole comprehensive plan is on hold, because we ain't got nowhere to put that heavy equipment, we can't get no dirt, we can't park the school buses, we can't have the parents drop their kids off, so what are we going to do?"

"Figure it out," he concluded.

Worner: Paying market value for Powell property

Worner, who has dealt most closely with architects and builders on the design of a new or renovated high school, said that if the county takes the route of building a new school, the acquired land would likely become part of the new building footprint. The reason: engineering studies have shown the existing HCHS facility is built on "soft soils," possibly contributing to cracks that have developed over time in the building.

See SCHOOLS, page A13

SCHOOLS

From page A12



ED-8 trustee Potts

"A 12-acre piece [of the site] would constitute a large part of where a new school would go," he said.

When school administrators first approached the landowners about acquiring the 15.21 acre property, they were presented with a purchase price of \$1.6 million, said Worner. HCPS arranged an appraisal that pegged the value at \$380,000, falling to around \$290,000 after shaving off some three acres. Due to rising land values in the past year, Worner said the negotiated \$360,000 price — \$30,000 per acre — was a fair deal for HCPS.

"As a school division, we're really not supposed to be purchasing property at anything other than market value," he said.

The money to purchase the land would be drawn from proceeds of the county's 1 cent school sales tax, approved by voters in 2019. Superintendent Lineburg said he had discussed the purchase with County Administrator Scott Simpson — expressing that Simpson concurs with his view that it would be appropriate to spend a portion of those sales tax dollars to purchase the site, since it would be integral to the modernization project.

Pressed by ED-7 trustee Keith McDowell — who suggested there is enough land at the high school to carry out a renovation project without more land — Worner explained that the HCHS campus encompasses some 75.4 acres. The Virginia Department of Education advises that high schools be built on 125 acres, a recommendation that has been in place since the 1990s, Worner added.

After Lloyd made the motion to buy the land, seconded by Edmunds, the board deadlocked 4-4, setting the stage for clashes among trustees later in the meeting.

Fraley: Bringing the conversation back around

At the end of the discussion on how to find new teachers and what to do about compensation, ED-8 trustee Potts pressed Assistant Superintendent Hall for answers on what could be done about the problem.

"What do we need to do?" asked Potts. "Do we need to have incentives? Can we afford incentives? I can answer that — no."

"We need some type of plan to make sure that we have some kind of outcome that leads to a positive manner," said Potts, suggesting that the administration might look into the possibility of housing assistance for new hires.

Board Chairman Kathy Fraley asked to respond to Potts and took the microphone.

"I can tell you a couple of things that we need to offer our brand new teachers, whether it's their first year or they have experience," said Fraley. "People who work in the building with them need to respect them."

That respect, she added, needs to extend from the administration on down "to the teacher that works next door to them. [Those] are the two things I heard when I went to the schools."

"It wasn't compensation. Teachers don't work for money, they work for the future of Halifax County."

Fraley continued by bringing up the problem of disrespectful students when Potts cut her off.

Saying she should direct her comments somewhere else other than him, Potts replied, "Some of the things you're telling me, I've already heard. I've been on the board five times longer than you."

The discussion wrapped up with a motion to go into closed session, ending the public portion of the meeting.

Potts, Moser exchange words on vaccinations

After the School Board recognized standstill students and teachers early in the meeting, ED-8 trustee Walter Potts broached a vexing topic: What to do about school employees who have not gotten vaccinated.

His comments came after School Nursing Supervisor Tina Slabach reported that around 60 to 70 percent of staff has opted to get vaccine shots. But the number of people now seeking to get vaccinated has dropped off sharply after an initial surge among employees, Slabach said.

Potts said that percentage needs to be around 85 to 90 percent and warned Halifax County Public Schools runs the risk of future COVID-19 flareups with such a large portion of the workforce unvaccinated.

He suggested that the school division make vaccination a condition of employment — drawing a response from Lineburg, who said a mandatory vaccination policy would be controversial and difficult to carry out.

Moser lit into the idea, noting that "I don't blame people for wanting to have a choice. When you start dictating what people have to get and what they don't have to get, that to me sounds like communism, it sounds like Adolph Hitler."

That drew ridicule in turn from Potts, who recalled being required as a child to get vaccinated for polio, a crippling disease that was a public health scourge at the time. He also pointed out that all schoolchildren must present proof of vaccination before they are allowed to enroll in school. He called the comparison to Nazism and communism "nonsense."

"What you're telling me is that it's okay to bring your infectious self to school and infect everybody else," Potts shot back at Moser.

"This has nothing to do with communism, this has everything to do with common sense."



Weather

Mostly sunny today through Wednesday with daytime highs in the low 90s for the period.

NEWS & RECORD

www.sovanow.com

50¢

Monday July 12, 2021

Volume 153 Issue 55

SERVING SOUTH BOSTON AND HALIFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA SINCE 1869

FATEFUL CHOICES AHEAD FOR HALIFAX COUNTY SCHOOLS

Countless issues, big dollars factor into facilities fix

How many elementaries? Where to build HCHS? Advisors take dim view of high school renovation

By LIZA FULTON News & Record Staff

County officials met Thursday to get their first deep-dive look at Halifax County's school modernization plans...

Two years after passage of a voter referendum to create a 1-cent local sales tax to pay for new school facilities...

Thursday at the HCMS library, members of the Joint Education Committee were joined by County Administrator Scott Simpson and Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mark Lineburg...

outdated high school and setting a future footprint for the county's oldest elementary schools.

The Joint Education Committee consists of three members each from the Halifax County School and Board of Supervisors...

Making the presentation were company representatives with Branch Builds and RRMM Architects, the Roanoke-based construction and architectural partners...

Their presentation raised countless new questions and appeared to settle others.

See FACILITIES, page A4



Branch Builds and RRMM Architects presented two options to modernize the high school: A new facility built at a site next to the existing HCHS (above), or substantial reconstruction of the school, retaining and upgrading the gymnasium and auditorium (at left, with new construction shown in orange.)

A4

THE NEWS & RECORD ■ SOUTH BOSTON/HALIFAX COUNTY, VA.

MONDAY, JULY 12, 2021

FACILITIES

From page A1

Brand Builds and RRMM officials presented six options for restructuring elementary schools...

Other proposals call for replacing Meadville and Sinai elementaries with a single school facility...

While the elementary school discussion spilled over into related knotty issues...

Whether Halifax County chooses to build a new facility or renovate and rebuild the existing HCHS...

To keep down costs, all options call for closing the Halifax STEM Center and integrating its offerings...

While school trustees and county supervisors were reminded on several occasions that future delays will only drive up the expense of modernization...

"There couldn't be more of a facilities challenge than there is in Halifax," said Lineburg in an interview after Thursday's meeting.

It is also a process that entails trade-offs regardless of the di-



Company representatives with Branch Builds and RRMM Architects present options (above) to members of the Joint Education Committee (left)



rection that county officials take. This is especially true insofar as the county's 1-percent sales tax won't be enough to pay the full cost of a new HCHS...

To tackle all the needs at once, Lineburg and Simpson identified four pots of money, current and potential, that could be tapped to pay for school construction and renovation work:

- » the county's local option sales tax revenue, which raised around \$2.8 million in the first year;
» operational savings from shuttering schools, a figure that could rise as high as \$4 million annually with only four elementaries in operation instead of seven;
» the lifting of debt service payments as loans mature on Cluster Springs and South Boston elementaries and the renovated middle school, all of which were built in the 2000s;
» raising the county's real estate tax anywhere from 5 to 9 cents in future years.

planning has been informed by another major consideration — how to align the future school footprint with declining population and student enrollment projections for Halifax County.

weighty questions — an example being the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining fewer elementaries. County school buildings currently house far fewer students than capacity limits allow.

Whether Halifax County wants to go in that direction is another matter.

"They are interesting and valid options," said Lineburg of the "right-size" school footprint.

But, he added, "the reason you look to consolidation is because it's the fiscally conservative approach to take. But sometimes efficiency concerns are outweighed by emotional ones.

"That's really the central crux of it ... These are big decisions," he said.

HCHS building cost: around \$136 mil

Here are highlights of the Joint Education Committee meeting, which took place Thursday among county supervisors, school trustees, administrators and company officials with Roanoke-based Branch Builds and RRMM Architects.

The School Board has entered into a Public-Private Partnership Act (PPEA) agreement with the two firms to develop plans for the design and construction of the high school. The two companies also presented preliminary options for revamping the county's oldest elementary facilities (*see related story, right*).

Halifax County High School

Branch Builds and RRMM peg the construction cost of a new high school

facility at \$136,675,600, based on plans to start work in early 2022 and wrap up the project by 2025. The companies also offered a slightly lower number, \$135,444,083, for rebuilding the school inside-out at the current location.

Renovating the facility for less money is not feasible due to the array of problems with the existing building, the builders said — they cited the soft soils the building sits on, to the crumbling structure itself, with the difficulties involved with replacing or reinforcing load-bearing and multi-floor walls, inside and out, with steel beams.

Renovations also would take longer to complete and would likely reveal hid-

See HCHS, page A5

Six options for county elementaries

Looking ahead to the future of Halifax County's elementary schools, school trustees and county supervisors have fixed their sights on the five oldest facilities: Clays Mill, Meadville, Scottsburg, Sinai and Sydnor Jennings. All were built more than 50 years ago, and each serves fewer students than they were built for.

Two of the schools — Sinai and Meadville — were left out of a 2001-2002 round of elementary school renovations, before new schools were built in South Boston and Cluster Springs. Clays Mill, Scottsburg and Sydnor Jennings got new gymnasiums and other upgrades, while Sinai and Meadville did not — an inequity that county of-

ficials have vowed to fix, without progress thus far.

Branch Builds and RRMM Architects, the School Board's construction partners on a school modernization plan, laid out six options for Halifax County's elementary school footprint of the future. The options spell out "order of magnitude costs" for construction, set against estimated operating costs under each configuration. Broadly speaking, operating costs go down with fewer schools to staff and manage.

Options identified by the two firms are as follows:

► Option 1: Keep all seven elementary schools with improvements to

See ELEMENTARIES, page A4

MONDAY, JULY 12, 2021

THE NEWS & RECORD ■ SOUTH BOSTON/HALIFAX

HCHS

From page A1

den problems with the building, driving up costs even further.

"If you tried to compare apples to apples [renovation and new construction], the renovation cost would be well above the cost provided," said RRMM President Duane Harver.

The new high school facility envisioned by Branch Builds and RRMM will keep operating costs down by maximizing utilization of the building — which, in practical terms, means rotating classes in and out of shared classrooms, rather than assigning individual classrooms to teachers. Every hour of every school day, rooms are not in use somewhere inside the existing HCHS facility, the building partners noted.

They presented two options for the HCHS footprint — erecting a facility next to the existing school, spilling out from the school bus parking lot, or a complete rebuild at the existing location. Both plans would produce a high school building with facing two-story wings, with 280,000 square feet of space to accommodate 1,500 students.

The renovation plan includes keeping the existing HCHS auditorium and gymnasium, albeit with significant improvements — tearing up and redoing the floors, and replacing all windows and doors. Also, renovations must address the issue of water infiltrating up from the ground.

"The existing piece we are keeping still needs significant renovations," said Branch Builds Preconstruction Manager Jaime English.

Included in both plans for the high school is a \$7,987,000 cost for upgrading athletic facilities, including the dilapidated HCHS football stadium. Eliminating several of the planned improvements — new lighting for tennis

courts and softball field, a resurfaced track, and a new baseball field — would trim the cost of the high school project from roughly \$136 million to \$128 million.

Other expenses left out of the estimated project cost are new furniture and electronic equipment. Also, soil samples will need to be collected before proceeding with construction on a new location footprint. One site plan placed the new school facility on property not owned by the school division — bringing trustees back around to their June meeting, when the School Board deadlocked 4-4 on a vote to purchase 12 acres adjacent to HCHS for \$360,000. Administrators had recommended the purchase for purposes of either using the land for a new school, or as a staging area for construction or renovation of the existing school.

School Board Chair Kathy Fraley, who is not a member of the Joint Education Committee but attended Thursday's meeting, said she had a big problem with the presentation by Branch Builds and RRMM on this score.

"We have 75 acres here [at the HCHS campus], you lost me when we looked at the plan of a new high school on property we don't even have. I want to see things that are realistic that are right now that we can deal with today," said Fraley, who voted against the land purchase in June.

"The land available nearby would be advantageous to have. We are trying to put all the options out there and share what we think is best," said Harver, the RRMM company president.

Answering other questions by county supervisors, the builders explained why lesser renovations are not feasible for HCHS. "This maybe a little late in the

game, but did you ever come up with an option to repair this school?" asked ED-5 supervisor Dean Throckmorton.

"We didn't price that based on the value of the structure," said English of Branch Builds, who added that some of the four-inch high school is of a low grade and would need to be reinforced with structural steel.

"Structurally, that is something that you wouldn't do currently," said English. Doing this work would involve opening up the existing brick and block wall: "So we did not look at that option," he said.

"Once we start to repair something or break into a structural wall, we have to bring that whole area up to code. There is a whole number of codes different now than the time when this building was built," added Branch Builds President Cathy Underwood, who cautioned that one repair would inevitably lead to another repair.

Other items that would have to be repaired to meet current codes include replacing the gymnasium bleachers, redoing access points to the school, and replacing any number of fixtures, furnishings and systems — from auditorium seating to electrical and HVAC and fire suppression and sprinkler systems.

"Whatever we decide to do, this is a 30-year decision," said Simpson.

Weighing on the timetable for the Joint Education Committee is the time it will take from project approval to actually completing a new high school. Estimates suggest it will take nine to 12 months to design the school and create construction documents. Construction of a new facility would take 28 months and even longer for a phased renovation project, company officials said.

ELEMENTARIES

From page A1

each except for South Boston and Cluster Springs. Improvements would include the replacement of building fixtures and systems — from windows to HVAC heating and cooling equipment — with all facilities brought into ADA compliance.

The building costs at Sinai and Meadville at a new school with 400-student capacity with the option of adding four additional classrooms, and make renovations to Scottsburg and Sydnor Jennings for a total construction budget of \$40.4 million. Operating costs would total \$19,250,796 annually.

Under Options 3, 4 and 5, Halifax County would operate five elementary schools under Option 2 the number is six, and under Option 1 the county would keep all seven existing elementaries. To create a "right-sized division," Branch Builds and RRMM presented Option 6, which entails keeping only four elementaries open.

► Option 6: Sinai, Meadville, and Clays Mill all close. Extension renovation and expansion work take place at Scottsburg (\$19 million) and Sydnor Jennings (\$18 million). Total construction costs would be \$37 million and annual operating costs would be \$17.9 million, the lowest of the options presented and about \$4 million less each year than operating seven elementary schools. This plan also would allow the soon-to-be-abandoned elementary schools to function as "swing schools" for students who are displaced during construction and renovation process.

► Option 5: Shut down Sinai, Meadville and Clays Mill and

build a new \$31 million school for 500 students, while renovations proceed at Scottsburg and Sydnor Jennings. Students at the shuttered schools would either attend the new facility or shift to new attendance zones and new schools. Total construction costs would be slightly under \$43.4 million Annual operating costs under this plan would fall to \$18,973,296.

► Option 5: Consolidate Sinai and Meadville at a new school with 400-student capacity with the option of adding four additional classrooms, and make renovations to Scottsburg and Sydnor Jennings for a total construction budget of \$40.4 million. Operating costs would total \$19,250,796 annually.

Under Options 3, 4 and 5, Halifax County would operate five elementary schools under Option 2 the number is six, and under Option 1 the county would keep all seven existing elementaries. To create a "right-sized division," Branch Builds and RRMM presented Option 6, which entails keeping only four elementaries open.

► Option 6: Sinai, Meadville, and Clays Mill all close. Extension renovation and expansion work take place at Scottsburg (\$19 million) and Sydnor Jennings (\$18 million). Total construction costs would be \$37 million and annual operating costs would be \$17.9 million, the lowest of the options presented and about \$4 million less each year than operating seven elementary schools. This plan also would allow the soon-to-be-abandoned elementary schools to function as "swing schools" for students who are displaced during construction and renovation process.

► Option 6 "is the most disruptive to the county as far families are concerned," said Branch Builds Preconstruction Manager Jaime

English.

Construction estimates are based on a present-day building costs, starting in 2022 and ending in year 2025. Option 6 would leave significant dollars at the end of the renovation phase to apply towards future maintenance needs. Options four, five, and six provide the longest return on investment, said the builders.

"Any options for elementary schools will cost, in round numbers, \$40 million and save a couple million dollars annually in operating cost," said County Administrator Scott Simpson.

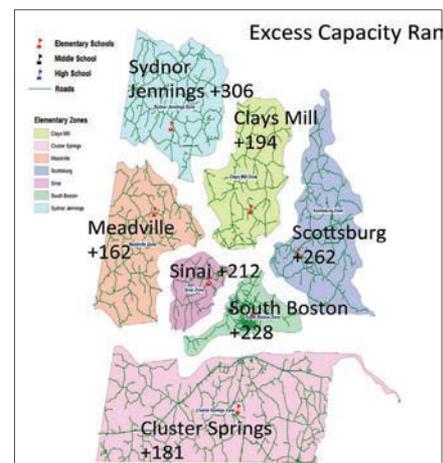
In ten years, South Boston and Cluster Springs elementary facilities will hit their 30-year mark, requiring updates to HVAC systems. The existing capital improvement fund will provide dollars to keep these schools efficient over the next decade with annual routine maintenance.

"Right now, the only thing we see 10 to 15 years down the road for those two schools and the middle school is HVAC mechanical upgrades," said HCPS Director of Maintenance and Operations Steve Brumfield, who took part in Thursday's meeting of the Joint Education Committee.

Making the numbers work

Simpson, the county administrator, spelled out possible revenue options for the elementary and high school construction upgrades. With proceeds from the county's 1-cent sales tax — which generated roughly \$2.8 million in the first year — Halifax County can start out with \$63,130,000 in capital, after borrowing the maximum amount that the sales tax revenue will support.

With the expiration of existing debt service and applying to those dollars towards future borrowing, Halifax will have about \$105.6 million to spend on new school



The school designers compiled information on the excess capacity of county elementaries.

facilities without requiring other revenues. With a total package cost of somewhere around \$175 million to \$180 million, the rest of the money would have to come from somewhere else — either from higher property taxes, or from school operational savings, or from an outside source such as the state or federal government.

Relying solely on the real estate tax, the rate might rise anywhere from 5 cents to 9 cents on top of the existing levy of \$0.50 per \$100 in value.

"Is it possible to fold operational savings into this plan?" asked Lineburg, referring to the dollars that would be saved each year by operating fewer elementary schools.

"I think operational savings can be put into it and [use that money] for debt service" on new school construction, said Simpson. "If

you are saving three million in one option, that's 6 to 7 cent of real estate to put into debt service. It just leave the schools with less room to grow operationally," he added.

"Savings like this have to be dedicated to [construction] for the two board to be on the same page," said Simpson.

Lineburg suggested the School Board and Board of Supervisors could enter into a historical agreement to capture operational savings and apply it to the capital budget.

"And for the next seven election cycles," said Simpson.

Officials are pressing the Joint Facilities Committee to make a decision in July and August in order to capture cost savings that will be in effect if Halifax County starts work on the school modernization in 2022.

Trustees push off facilities fix – again

By KIKI McLAUGHLIN
News & Record Staff

The Halifax County School Board will hold its next meeting on a wide-ranging school modernization plan on August 25 — after trustees met Monday night and once again aired sharp differences on the direction the county should take with Halifax County High School and its older elementary facilities.

The 7-1 vote to defer discussion on a facilities plan came after an hour-long-plus meeting and no consensus. School Board

School Board resumes talks on plan of action for high school, elementaries, and exposes lack of consensus on direction to take

Chair Kathy Fraley pushed for an immediate vote to move forward with school modernization, but other trustees argued successfully that the board should wait until Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mark Lineburg finishes a report and produces dollar figures on an all-encompassing plan he has been working on. That initiative, which Lineburg

called the “most difficult, challenging work I’ve done in my entire career,” would address the interconnected goals of updating the high school and elementary schools and bringing Halifax’s lagging school salaries into line with neighboring school divisions. Monday’s discussion pointed to just how many loose ends must

be tied together to satisfy individual and oft-competing priorities of school trustees. Two members, Todd Moser (ED-6) and Keith McDowell (ED-7), both said they would not vote to build a new high school, in part based on the need to renovate five elementary buildings that are more than a half-century old. McDowell further said he

would not support closing any of the oldest elementaries — Clays Mill, Meadville, Scottsburg, Sina and Sydnor Jennings — and ripped into the idea of replacing HCHS, which opened in 1979, the same year that McDowell said he moved into his home.

“My house was built in 1979,” he said. “You think I’m going to tear it down? No — I’m going to fix what I have and I’m going to take care of it.”

McDowell called the idea of a new high school “ridiculous” and

See TRUSTEES, page A6

A6

THE NEWS & RECORD ■ SOUTH BOSTON/HALIFAX COUNTY, VA.

THURSDAY, JULY 29, 2021

TRUSTEES

From page A1

pointed to the amount of unused space in the HCHS facility, especially in the old C-wing that houses Career and Technical Education programs, as proof. “That high school, it needs work, it needs to be renovated, but it needs to be clean,” said McDowell, adding, “It has been neglected and we need to step up to the plate and take care of what we have.” That drew a sharp retort from ED-5 trustee Freddie Edmunds, who cited an adage from his grandmother: “You get what you pay for.

“What you’re talking about is patching up something. You’re talking about maybe putting \$25 to \$30 million into the high school,” said Edmunds. “You’re not talking about renovation, let’s get that straight. Because if you’re talking about renovation you’re talking about building [portions of HCHS anew.]”

“You’re talking about patching up — tell the truth,” he said.

Edmunds also tore into McDowell’s refusal to consider consolidation of any of the county’s elementaries, which could yield operational savings over decades to help pay for a new high school and reno-

vated or all-new elementary schools. Touching on an issue that came up in different contexts throughout the evening — Halifax County’s declining student enrollment — Edmunds told McDowell, “You can’t have it both ways.”

“We can’t have 100 kids inside a school that was built to accommodate 240 kids,” he said. (The county’s smallest elementary, Clays Mill, had 139 students in 2021, followed by 174 at Meadville.) Edmunds continued, “You want to invest more money in elementary schools that don’t enough people to be there ... but you don’t want to invest money in a 21st century [high] school? That doesn’t make sense to me.”

He called for tearing down the existing HCHS building and rebuilding it — and for Halifax County to “be focused on education and prepare [students] for the 21st century.” Edmunds added, “It’s going to cost you money. We’re not living in the 1960s or 1970s. This is the 21st century — we have to provide the technology for our kids to be successful in today’s society.”

Several board members took issue with the plan for the high school put forward by the School Board’s construction advisors, Roanoke-based Branch Builds and RRMM Architects, which redesigned and renovated Halifax County Middle School where Monday night’s meeting took place.

Last year the School Board entered into a public-private partnership with Branch Builds and RRMA Architects to produce a plan for modernizing Halifax County High School, without committing to hiring the firms to handle the

actual work. From that partnership agreement sprang the additional assignment of drawing up plans for modernizing the oldest elementaries.

The two firms have recommended two possible approaches for HCHS — either build an all-new facility, at a site next to the current building, which would cost an estimated \$136.7 million, or tear down most of the school expect for the auditorium and gym and rebuild the rest, streamlining the sprawling high school in a more compact facility. That substantial rebuild would cost \$135.4 million, the companies advised.

Branch Builds and RRMM also produced six options for the future of Halifax County’s elementaries — all involving renovations to bring old facilities up to date, costing anywhere from \$31 million to \$45 million.

One iteration of the Branch Builds-RRMM proposal calls for keeping all five older schools open along with South Boston and Cluster Springs elementaries, the newest buildings in the fleet. Other options call for shuttering two or three elementary buildings and assigning their students to nearby schools that would be brought up to modern standards. The difference in operational expense could be as high as \$3 million annually, roughly the same amount of money that Halifax County is projected to reap from the 1-cent sales tax that voters approved in 2019.

Moser, the school board vice-chairman, suggested a different tack — starting over with new construction partners.

Voicing disbelief at the

cost figures produced by Branch Builds and RRMM — “You can’t tell me that a renovation is only a two million dollar difference than a new high school, it’s no way possible” — Moser pointed to a much less costly school project in a county next to Halifax: the construction of Rustburg Middle School in Campbell, which Moser said comes at a cost of \$47 million and would accommodate 900 students, about 470 less than now attend HCHS.

(According to the Lynchburg News & Advance, Campbell County in 2020 finalized a \$41.2 million contract for the construction of a 700-student Rustburg Middle School, which will have a building footprint about half the size of the proposed new high school for Halifax County.)

Moser said the School Board should hire a new general contractor and architects under the traditional design-build process for school construction — which would allow the board to seek bids on different parts of an encompassing construction project, as opposed to the streamlined, all-in-one plan that Branch Builds and RRMM have offered to carry out.

Moser said the design-build approach would allow the School Board to get “our own architect and have him draw it the way we want it so we would have the say-so” over the design of a new HCHS.

“I believe somebody is pulling the wool over somebody’s eyes,” he said of the proposals on the table now.

Jay Camp (ED-4) said he agreed with Moser’s point, asking, “What’s to stop us from getting another price as far as the high school is

concerned?” But while other trustees indicated their willingness to look at other possible builders, some expressed doubts that getting new price quotes would significantly lower the cost of the project.

Roy Keith Lloyd (ED-2) brought the discussion around to previous studies of the all high school — done by other architects and builders, and all indicating that renovations could not be effectively done on the cheap. He pointed to a 2018 study by Moseley Architects, which pegged the cost of renovating HCHS at \$88 million, and building a new school for \$99 million. A separate 2019 study by OWPR Architects, commissioned by the Board of Supervisors, largely upheld those estimates.

Lloyd said that by 2020, the estimated cost of a new HCHS had risen to \$110 million and now stands at around \$130 million — the cost of delaying a decision. He also circled back to McDowell’s suggestion that the School Board could spend a relatively low sum to fix up HCHS without doing a full-bore renovation. Lloyd pointed to another finding by Moseley Architects — that simply addressing critical needs such as new HVAC and electrical systems and securing the high school building would cost \$53 million.

“If you address critical needs only, we are going to back on this project 10 years from now. It’s not going to be 30 years,” he said.

“If we don’t act now, we’re setting the county up for failure for the next 30 to 50 years,” Lloyd added.

He, Edmunds and trustees Sandra Garner-Coleman (ED-2) and Walter Potts (ED-8) expressed the most openness to construction of a new high school, but Lloyd and Garner-Coleman urged giving Lineburg more time to come up with a comprehensive proposal on determining a path forward.

“There is not a person in Halifax County who knows the numbers better than Dr. Lineburg,” said Lloyd.

By the 7-1 vote, with McDowell in opposition, that’s what trustees opted to do. They will meet again Aug. 25 to review what is expected to be a long-term budget for teacher and staff pay increases, and work to HCHS and elementary schools.

“Once we put that plan of the table we’ve got to watch our budget and we’ve got to watch it to the ‘T,’” said Garner-Coleman.

As part of his due diligence, Lineburg said he would report his findings and recommendations to County Administrator Scott Simpson and to the Virginia Department of Education, whose deputy director, Kent Dickey, took part in the statewide Crumbling Schools Tour stop-over last week at Halifax County High School.

Lineburg said he has discussed his ideas with Dickey, a 30-year VDOE veteran, who responded that “compensation and facilities [go] hand-in-hand” and added “it’s unusual and refreshing” for a local school board “to take a comprehensive approach.”

Lineburg also said he was open to pursuing Moser’s recommendation for a design-build solution to HCHS and elementary renovations, thus ending the PPEA with Branch Builds and RRMM. “If you go back to design-build, it’s going to slow [the process] down a little bit, but if that makes everybody comfortable, I’m fine with that,” he said.

Benton Thomas
• OFFICE PRODUCTS •
SUPPLIES • FURNITURE • PRINTING
All things Office Supplies • Technology
for the Furniture • Printing • Promotional
office... Breakroom • Janitorial
434-572-3577 or 1-800-888-3577
Fax 434-572-1322
408 Edmunds Street • South Boston, VA 24592
Order online: www.bentonthomas.com

Bagwell & Bagwell, P.C.
George H. Bagwell
John A. Terry
Attorneys-at-Law
Personal Injury • Real Estate
Criminal Law • Wills & Estates
Wrongful Death • Family Law
47 S. Main Street, Halifax, VA 24558
434-476-6521

Legal Notice

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC OF THE PETITION OF VIRGINIA ELECTRIC AND POWER COMPANY FOR APPROVAL OF A PLAN FOR ELECTRIC DISTRIBUTION GRID TRANSFORMATION PROJECTS PURSUANT TO § 56-585.1 A 6 OF THE CODE OF VIRGINIA CASE NO. PUR-2021-00127

On June 21, 2021, Virginia Electric and Power Company (“Dominion” or “Company”) filed a petition with the State Corporation Commission (“Commission”) for approval of a plan for electric distribution grid transformation projects (“Petition”) pursuant to § 56-585.1 A 6 (“Subsection A 6”) of the Code of Virginia and the Commission’s Rules Governing Utility Rate Applications and Annual Informational Filings of Investor-Owned Electric Utilities, 20 VAC 5-204-5 *et seq.* Specifically, Dominion seeks approval of Phase II of its ten-year plan to transform its electric distribution grid (“GT Plan”), which consists of proposed projects in 2022 and 2023.

Dominion states that fundamental changes in the energy industry have prompted the need for electric utilities across the country to modernize their distribution grids. The total proposed investment associated with Phase II of the GT Plan is \$669.4 million in capital investment and \$109.5 million in operations and maintenance investments.

The Company states that Phase II of the GT Plan comprises 14 projects, including: (i) advanced metering infrastructure (“AMI”); (ii) the customer information platform (“CIP”); (iii) grid improvement projects, both grid infrastructure (2 projects) and grid technologies (6 projects); (iv) cyber and physical security; (v) telecommunications; and (vi) customer education. The Company represents that many of the projects in Phase II of the GT Plan focus on facilitating the integration of distributed energy resources (“DERs”). The Company further represents that, in preparing the GT Plan, it evaluated each proposed project to determine whether any environmental justice concerns exist.

The Company states that in Phase I of the GT Plan, it has pursued projects focused on the vital objectives of grid reliability and security. The Company states that it plans to continue the non-pilot grid transformation projects in Phase II, including the CIP, physical security, and other projects.

According to Dominion, the primary focus of Phase II involves facilitating the integration of DERs. The Company proposes to deploy AMI and intelligent grid devices that will gather data and then will transmit that data in near real-time over a secure telecommunications network. The Company plans to fully deploy AMI across the service territory, and requests in Phase II to deploy approximately 1.1 million smart meters and associated infrastructure. The Company states that it also proposes to install systems that will manage and use this influx of data — a DER management system and an enterprise asset management system — as well as a system that will leverage the capabilities of intelligent grid devices to improve customer reliability through fault location, isolation, and service restoration functionality.

The Company also plans to deploy system-wide time-varying rates that will be available to all residential customers in 2024. Dominion represents that this plan and timeframe generally aligns with the completion of the new CIP and the system-wide deployment of AMI.

The Commission entered an Order for Notice and Hearing that, among other things, scheduled public hearings on Dominion’s Petition. On October 8, 2021, at 10 a.m., the Commission will hold a telephonic hearing for the purpose of receiving the testimony of public witnesses, with no public witness present in the Commission’s courtroom.

On or before October 4, 2021, any person desiring to offer testimony as a public witness shall provide to the Commission (a) your name, and (b) the telephone number that you wish the Commission to call during the hearing to receive your testimony. This information may be provided to the Commission in three ways: (i) by filling out a form on the Commission’s website at www.scc.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting; (ii) by completing and emailing the PDF version of this form to SCCInfo@scc.virginia.gov; or (iii) by calling (804) 371-9141. This public witness hearing will be webcast at www.scc.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting.

On October 12, 2021, at 1 p.m., either in the Commission’s second floor courtroom located in the Tyler Building, 1300 East Main Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219, or by electronic means, a Commission will convene a hearing to receive testimony and evidence offered by the Company, any respondents, and the Commission’s Staff on the Company’s Petition. Further details on this hearing will be provided by subsequent Commission Order or Hearing Examiner’s Ruling.

The Commission has taken judicial notice of the recent public health emergency related to the spread of the coronavirus, or COVID-19, and the declarations of emergency issued at both the state and federal levels. In accordance therewith, all pleadings, briefs, or other documents required to be served in this matter should be submitted electronically to the extent authorized by 5 VAC 5-20-150, *Copies and format*, of the Commission’s Rules of Practice and Procedure, 5 VAC 5-20-10 *et seq.* (“Rules of Practice”). Confidential and Extraordinarily Sensitive Information shall not be submitted electronically and should comply with 5 VAC 5-20-170, *Confidential information*, of the Rules of Practice. Any person seeking to hand deliver and physically file or submit any pleading or other document shall contact the Clerk’s Office Document Control Center at (804) 371-9838 to arrange the delivery.

Pursuant to 5 VAC 5-20-140, *Filing and service*, of the Rules of Practice, the Commission has directed that service on parties and the Commission’s Staff in this matter shall be accomplished by electronic means. Please refer to the Commission’s Order for Notice and Hearing for further instructions concerning Confidential or Extraordinarily Sensitive Information.

An electronic copy of the public version of the Company’s Petition may be obtained by submitting a written request to counsel for the Company, Vishwa B. Link, Esquire, McGuireWoods LLP, Gateway Plaza, 800 East Canal Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219, or vlink@mcguirewoods.com.

On or before August 13, 2021, any person or entity wishing to participate as a respondent in this proceeding may do so by filing a notice of participation with the Clerk of the State Corporation Commission c/o Document Control Center, P.O. Box 2118, Richmond, Virginia 23218-2118 or at www.scc.virginia.gov/clk/efiling. Such notice of participation shall include the email addresses of such parties or their counsel. The respondent simultaneously shall serve a copy of the notice of participation on counsel to the Company. Pursuant to 5 VAC 5-20-80 B, *Participation as a respondent*, of the Rules of Practice, any notice of participation shall set forth: (i) a precise statement of the interest of the respondent; (ii) a statement of the specific action sought to the extent then known; and (iii) the factual and legal basis for the action. Any organization, corporation, or government body participating as a respondent must be represented by counsel as required by 5 VAC 5-20-30, *Counsel*, of the Rules of Practice. All filings shall refer to Case No. PUR-2021-00127.

On or before September 13, 2021, each respondent may file with the Clerk of the Commission, at the address above or at www.scc.virginia.gov/clk/efiling, and serve on the Commission’s Staff, the Company, and all other respondents, any testimony and exhibits by which the respondent expects to establish its case, and each witness’s testimony shall include a summary not to exceed one page. In all filings, respondents shall comply with the Rules of Practice, as modified herein, including, but not limited to, 5 VAC 5-20-140, *Filing and service*, and 5 VAC 5-20-240, *Prepared testimony and exhibits*. All filings shall refer to Case No. PUR 2021-00127.

On or before September 30, 2021, any interested person wishing to comment on the Company’s Petition may file comments by following the instructions on the Commission’s website: <http://www.scc.virginia.gov/case> or by filing such comments with the Clerk of the Commission at the address above. All such comments shall refer to Case No. PUR-2021-00127.

Any documents filed in paper form with the Office of the Clerk of the Commission in this docket may use both sides of the paper. In all other respects, except as modified by the Commission’s Order for Notice and Hearing, all filings shall comply fully with the requirements of 5 VAC 5-20-150, *Copies and format*, of the Rules of Practice.

The public version of the Company’s Application and other documents filed in this case, the Commission’s Rules of Practice, and the Commission’s Order for Notice and Hearing may be viewed at: www.scc.virginia.gov/pages/Case-Information.

Weather

Mostly sunny and less humid today through Sunday. Highs in the mid 90s. Saturday will be clear with afternoon temperatures approaching 100.

NEWS & RECORD

50¢ Thursday August 26, 2021

Volume 153 Issue 66

SERVING SOUTH BOSTON AND HALIFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA SINCE 1869

NEW HIGH SCHOOL, THREE CLOSED ELEMENTARIES, COMPETITIVE PAY
A long-term plan, many moving parts

Lineburg: Savings from shuttered schools, operating efficiencies will leave Halifax with money to modernize facilities, raise salaries

By TOM McLAUGHLIN News & Record Staff

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mark Lineburg laid out a plan Wednesday for the Halifax County School Board that would fix the biggest problems facing the school division — low employee pay, a badly outdated high school, and an inefficient elementary school building fleet — all in one fell swoop.

The cost to achieve the long-term objectives would be a two-cent increase in the county's real estate tax rate, and tens of millions of dollars in operational savings by closing three elementary schools: Clays Mills, Meadville and Sinai.

In exchange, Halifax County would have enough money to build a new high school, renovate Sydnor Jennings and Scottsburg to pair up with Cluster Springs and South Boston, the newest facilities in the HCPS building fleet, and make Halifax's teacher pay scale the most generous among the county's Virginia neighbors.

"Let's be the best paid county in our

area," said Lineburg at Wednesday work session aimed at bringing trustees together around a plan for the high school and the division's other pressing needs. "We must compete and we must get our teachers back."

The comprehensive plan by Lineburg rests on multiple sources of major funding — some that would developed over the long-term, others available in the here and now. On the latter, Halifax County Public Schools has \$4 million in one-time federal pandemic relief funding that it can apply toward facilities improvements, as long as the money is spent by September 2024.

"It creates some urgency for us," he said. But most of Lineburg's proposal relies on long-term savings by modernizing and downsizing facilities, and reducing payroll costs over time. With only four elementary schools in operation, personnel savings over a 30-year period would be somewhere between \$65,625,000 and \$72,825,000. A consensus estimate of savings is around \$69.2 million, Lineburg said.



On the block: From top, Clays Mill Elementary, Meadville Elementary and Sinai Elementary.

That's the figure "that I'm comfortable with right now.

"If you do go down that path, you keep that money in the budget and it gives you leverage to keep the tax rate low," he said.

In sum, Lineburg's plan offers a combination of revenue raisers and cost savings

that would add up to \$265.5 million over 30 years to spend on modern school facilities and higher employee pay.

The separate pots of money include:

» \$98.8 million in revenue over 30 years from the county's one-cent sales tax.

See LINEBURG, page A6

LINEBURG

From page A1

» \$66 million over the same period, from local tax dollars that now go toward debt service, and could be rolled over to pay for new facilities once the existing debt expires.

» \$2.8 million in operational savings — from the

utility and maintenance budget — by replacing the inefficient and antiquated Halifax County High School building.

» about \$6.68 million in operational savings from operating four elementary schools instead of seven.

» personnel savings from having few elementary school employees, around \$69 million over the three-decade period.

» \$4 million in federal pandemic ESSER III funding.

» carryover money in the school capital budget: \$3.8 million, in one-time funding.

» a two-cent real estate tax increase, yielding \$762,000 annually and nearly \$23 million over 30 years.

The tax increase would be used to raise the teacher pay scale, under which compensation for Halifax County teachers has fallen behind that of peer counties in Southside Virginia.

While Halifax is generally competitive with its neighbors on starting teacher

pay, teachers with years of experience have departed the system to earn higher salaries elsewhere.

Lineburg's plan would begin to fix that problem almost immediately — with a mid-stream adjustment of the teacher salary scale, based on a commitment by the Halifax County Board of Supervisors to support the salary increases with a two-cent increase in the county's 50-cent real estate tax rate. The proposed 52-cent rate could be implemented all at once, or in one-cent increments in 2022 and 2023.

For its part, the School Board would be required to use \$3 million in budget carryover funds to implement the pay increases by January 2022. The plan also relies on the elimination of 10 positions and a retirement incentive plan to buy out some of the division's longest-tenured and most expensive employees.

In turn, teachers would receive mid-year pay increases — weighed most heavily toward teachers

with 10 years of experience or more. Under the reformed teacher pay scale put forward by Lineburg, teachers with 10 years in the system would see their salaries rise by \$2,249, from \$42,875 to \$45,124.

Teachers with 20 years' experience would receive a \$5,585 pay increase, pushing their salaries to \$51,910. At 25 years, teachers who now earn \$50,248 would see their salaries rise to \$55,512, a bump in pay of \$5,264.

ED-3 trustee Sandra Garner-Coleman interjected that she would like to see the plan take effect even earlier, possibly by December, given the low pay that county teachers and school staff have long borne.

"I think our teachers and support staff are long overdue — long overdue," she said.

The overhaul of the teacher pay scale would cost \$1,864,000 annually. After achieving that, Lineburg said the next priority should be a similar upgrade of the pay scale for support staff, at an additional cost of \$797,800 per year.

Under that proposal scale, compensation for teacher aides would go from less than \$17,600 annually to nearly \$23,000; central office and school secretaries would go from making between \$24,851 and \$27,374 annually to between \$29,605 and \$31,327, respectively; and salaries for school principals would go from \$72,733 to \$78,505 annually.

The final piece of the employee compensation plan, and last on the list of priorities, is higher compensation for central office administrators.

While the pay scales could go into effect soon with a commitment by the Board of Supervisors to enact the two-cent property tax hike, the long-term viability of the plan relies on shrinking and refocusing operations around fewer and more efficient schools.

There, Lineburg told trustees that the current fleet of buildings is badly out of sync with conditions in Halifax County, which lost 6.1 percent of its population over the past decade, according to the Census Bureau.

The county's shrinking population has left its elementary schools operating at below 50 percent capacity at all but one of the county's five oldest schools.

Meadville Elementary is at 58.3 percent capacity, while Sinai and Scottsburg operate at just under 50

THURSDAY, AUGUST 26, 2021

THE NEWS & RECORD ■ SOUTH



J.R. Tucker High School, under construction in Richmond, offers a model for construction of a new HCHS facility.

PLAN

From page A6

percent. Sydnor Jennings runs at 38.2 capacity, and at Clays Mill, the lowest-enrollment school with some 130 students, capacity is at 29.9 percent.

Lineburg noted that the inefficient footprint of Halifax County elementary schools is not a new issue, pointing to a 1995 Virginia Department of Education study that suggested the county could save money by consolidating around elementary schools built to house some 400 to 500 students. Such facilities, he said, would be equipped to offer a richer curriculum with arts, music, physical education and other features.

Lineburg called a 400-500 student facility a "prototypical elementary school" and noted the similarities between the 1995 study and what his research points to. "It's amazing how similar it is to what we had in 1995," he said.

He recommended that trustees commit to a footprint of four elementary schools — along with building a new high school — but he also presented options for merging Meadville and Sinai together, giving Halifax six elementary schools, or taking that step and closing Clays Mill, leaving five elementary schools in operation.

In addition to yielding

lower savings in the operating budget, having more schools would entail higher capital costs. Building a new facility to replace Meadville and Sinai — most likely at the existing Meadville school site — would incur future facility costs of \$44 million.

With that and a shuttered Clays Mill school — which would entail renovations to the schools that remain open — the facilities expense would continue to hover around \$44 million.

Future facilities expenses with four schools would be only \$37 million, with the highest operational savings as a result.

Turning to the matter that has vexed the School Board in recent months — what to do about the high school — Lineburg advocated the construction of an entirely new facility, at a projected cost of around \$123 million if the county moves quickly. He argued that the worst option would be a simple repair, which engineers have said would cost \$75 million or more without addressing the fundamental shortcomings of HCHS.

"It's a poor building and a poor design," he said.

In putting together his numbers, Lineburg said he has consulted closely with the Virginia Department of Education, referred to nu-

merous studies by multiple design and engineering firms that have assessed the high school, and worked in tandem with Halifax County Administrator Scott Simpson. He said the Board of Supervisors must be treated as partners with the School Board before trustees move forward with a plan for the future.

And he expressed confidence in his numbers, calling them "extremely conservative.

"There will be no surprises to my colleague on the Board of Supervisors [County Administrator Simpson] in this document today," he said.

Following his morning presentation, and before taking a recess for lunch, members of the School Board declined to act on a motion by Garner-Coleman to adopt Lineburg's proposal, which is expected to set a series of meetings in motion between trustees and supervisors in coming days.

Later in the afternoon, architects and builders with companies that have reviewed the condition of HCHS presented their views to the School Board, and trustees also heard from school officials in Mecklenburg and Campbell counties on their recent school construction projects.

Advertisement for huppcpa.com, a Certified Public Accountant firm, offering services like payroll, tax advisory, and business consulting.

Large advertisement for America's Mattress featuring iComfort by Serta mattresses. Includes a '100 Days Same As Cash!' offer, 'SAVE UP TO \$1000' on qualified purchases, and a '\$999 Queen Bed Bundle' with a 10" Gel Memory Foam mattress. Also mentions 'LIMITED TIME LABOR DAY SAVINGS!' and 'SPECIAL FINANCING' options.

See PLAN, page A7

Weather

Rain clouds today and Friday with daytime highs in the mid 80s. Cloudy this weekend with highs in the upper 80s.

NEWS & RECORD

50¢

Thursday
September 16, 2021

Volume 153 Issue 72

SERVING SOUTH BOSTON AND HALIFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA SINCE 1869

Trustees back new HCHS, pay package

Stalled priorities move ahead as School Board dips to seven members

By TOM McLAUGHLIN
News & Record Staff

A short-numbered Halifax County School Board voted Monday to back the construction of a new Halifax County High School and send a plan to the Halifax Board of Supervisors to dramatically raise the compensation of school employees — teachers and other staff — by next year.

The actions came as the balance of the power on the School Board shifted with the resignation of vice chairman Todd Moser and the absence of ED-7 trustee Keith McDowell, a vociferous critic of building a new high school to replace the dilapidated HCHS facility. The six trustees in attendance at Monday's meeting voted unanimously to support the employee compensation proposal but split 4-2 on construction of a new high school.

The motion to build a new HCHS facility was put on the floor by ED-2 trustee Roy Keith Lloyd, seconded by ED-3 trustee Sandra Garner-Coleman. Lloyd said the issue of the high school



ED-8 trustee Walter Potts and new vice chair Roy Keith Lloyd

has lingered for the entirety of his four years on the board, and he declined to amend his motion to endorse a second option — renovation of the existing facility — as suggested by ED-4 board member Jay Camp.

"I understand that [the recommendation for a new high school] may get changed down the road, but I'd like to move forward with new construction based on the information that's been presented, the numbers that we have so far," said Lloyd.

Lloyd, Garner-Coleman, Freddie Edmunds in ED-5 and Walter Potts in ED-8 voted in favor of building a new high school facility. Board Chair Kathy Fraley (ED-1) and Camp voted no.

Both Fraley and Camp said they were heeding the wishes of their constituents in opposing an all-new HCHS, although Camp

allowed that a comprehensive plan developed by Superintendent of Schools Mark Lineburg to guide the future of Halifax County Public Schools "definitely opened my eyes" to the possibility of achieving the board's major goals. Those goals include making teacher compensation the best in the region, renovating the county's elementary schools, and replacing HCHS with a modern facility.

"I'm not shutting the door on a new high school," said Camp, but he added the School Board should be mindful of the needs of all county schools over the next 40 years, when the five oldest elementary buildings would be turning 100 years old.

"This is kind of a once-in-a-lifetime shot," he said.

See TRUSTEES, page A7

Moser steps down from School Board, resigns as animal warden

Embattled ED-6 trustee Todd Moser tendered his resignation to the Halifax County School Board on Sunday night, leaving the board with only seven members. Trustees at Monday night's monthly meeting unanimously elected Roy Keith Lloyd to succeed Moser as vice chair.



Moser

Moser, who has been implicated in an embezzlement scheme as Halifax County's chief animal warden, allegedly stole county funds over a five-year period, according to an email sent this week by Halifax County Administrator Scott Simpson to Supervisors. Reached by the News & Record on Sunday, Moser declined comment on the allegations.

On Monday, Moser also submitted his resignation as animal control department head, said Hubert Pannell, chairman of the Halifax County Board of Supervisors.

"He has resigned from everything," said Pannell, who said that Moser informed Simpson of his decision Monday around 10 a.m. "He has no standing with the county whatsoever."

Pannell expressed criticism of how Moser's job status was handled after, as detailed in Simpson's email, he admitted wrongdoing in the alleged embezzlement scheme. "I truly felt he should have been terminated. That decision was made by the county administrator. He made that decision [to place Moser on paid administrative leave].

"I believe a better decision would have been to terminate him immediately," said Pannell.

See MOSER, page A2

TRUSTEES

From page A1

The School Board acted on two other major items: trustees voted to acquire a 12-acre tract next to the high school, either to become part of the footprint of a new HCHS building or to use as a construction staging site, and they agreed to hold a series of town hall meetings on elementary school consolidation, leading up to an anticipated vote by the School Board in November on closing some schools.

On the topic of consolidation, Garner-Coleman originally offered a motion to reduce the current number of elementary schools from seven to either four or five, echoing the recommendations of Lineburg's comprehensive school plan. Under the superintendent's proposal, the cost savings from operating only four county elementary schools would be channeled into other priorities, such as higher employee salaries.

But other trustees said before taking a step as momentous as closing one or more schools, the School Board first should hear from the public.

"We have big decisions to make in coming months, and I do think the community should be part of those conversations," said Lloyd.

Garner-Coleman expressed agreement with Lloyd but added that the elementary facility debate should encompass all five schools in the northern part of the county, not just schools targeted for closure. "We need to hear from all of them [affected school communities] before we make a decision," she said.

Lineburg, at an Aug. 25 meeting, proposed shutting down three of the county's smallest and oldest facilities — at Clays Mill, Meadville and Sinai — and reassigning the elementary student population at four schools that would remain open: Cluster Springs and South Boston, the newest buildings in the fleet, and Scottsburg and Sydnor Jennings, in northern Halifax County, each of which would require expansion and renovation.

The resulting footprint would leave three elementary schools with around 450 to 600 students each, and one, South Boston Elementary, serving a somewhat larger population. SBES now has a student

body of some 780 children.

As a more expensive alternative, HCPS could operate five schools by closing Clays Mill — the smallest school, with around 140 students — and combining Sinai and Meadville at a single modern facility. The downside to that idea, Lineburg said, is such a configuration would leave less money to address long-term needs such as higher employee pay.

"Sustainability of compensation is directly tied to the configuration of elementary schools," he noted.

Under Lineburg's plan to reform employee salary scales, teachers would make as much in their fifth year of employment as they now earn after 11 years of service, \$43,016 annually. Under the current scale, base teacher salaries are essentially flat over the first six years of employment, with modest annual pay hikes after that.

With the current step scale in place, Halifax teachers must work 43 years before achieving the top teacher salary paid by HCPS, of \$66,705 annually. Lineburg's plan would cut that timeline down to 31 years. Significant pay hikes are built into the scale throughout.

Key to implementing Lineburg's employee compensation proposal is a series of cost-saving measures: eliminating 10 positions, offering a one-time retirement incentive to the division's long-tenured and highest-paid teachers, and getting a commitment from the Halifax County Board of Supervisors to use \$3.8 million in carryover budget funds to raise employee compensation by July 2022 and possibly sooner.

Supervisors also will be asked to raise the county's real estate tax rate by 2 cents, from \$0.50 to \$0.52 per \$100 in value, which would raise about \$770,000 annually to plow into teacher and support staff pay scales.

The tax increase is one of several asks that the School Board intends to present to the Board of Supervisors, which controls local purse strings. To upgrade facilities, trustees are counting on the roughly \$100 million that the county's 1-cent sales tax will generate over the next 30 years, supplemented by several other pots of money.

These include budget carryover funds and expiring debt service — each controlled by supervisors, and which could be used to improve facilities and compensation, Lineburg has suggested.

Separately, the School Board has \$4 million in federal pandemic relief funds under its control that it can spend on facilities, provided the money is allocated by 2024. Another major element of Lineburg's plan are the long-term operational savings that would result from closing three elementary schools.

The medley of revenue raisers and cost savings would generate roughly \$265.5 million over 30 years — enough to afford a \$130 million high school, a \$39 million elementary renovation project, and employee pay hikes.

The challenge of bringing the two boards together around a consensus plan for the schools clearly weighed on trustees, with Potts in particular sounding a skeptical note that supervisors can be counted on to provide the necessary funding. But Edmunds was more optimistic as he encouraged the School Board to act.

"We can only do what we can," Edmunds said as the board voted on the employee compensation plan. "We can't second guess the Board of Supervisors. I believe the Board of Supervisors will do what's right. But we must take that first step and do what's right."

In endorsing a new high school, the four-member majority agreed to a second provision: by October, they will choose the best method of construction — either entering into a PPEA (public-private partnership act) agreement with a contractor-architectural team, or using a traditional design-build approach in which parts of the building process would be put out for bid, or a hybrid option that incorporates aspects of both PPEA and design-build methods.

On top of the other, more far-reaching actions taken by the School Board on Monday, trustees also reversed a failed vote in June to purchase land adjoining the HCHS campus.

The Powell property, as it is known, consists of 12 acres that sits up the hill from the high school, with

frontage on Halifax Road. In June, the board deadlocked 4-4 on a proposal to buy the property for \$360,000. With two "no" votes from June — Moser and McDowell — out of the picture Monday night, trustees held a re-vote, which succeeded 4-2 this time.

Garner-Coleman, Lloyd, Edmunds and Potts voted yes, Fraley and Camp voted no. It remains to be seen whether the owners of the property will accept the same \$360,000 offer that the School Board voted down in June, but Scott Worner, the administration's point person on the high school project, said the sellers have indicated that "once the board is ready to make a commitment, they would be willing to entertain that offer."

Potts added that the School Board is fortunate to have the opportunity to acquire the property for \$360,000: "The man has given us a good deal on it, is what he's doing," he said.

Worner said three separate studies have identified the tract as suitable for construction of a new school, although the 12 acres could instead be used to store construction materials and equipment or serve as the footprint for mobile classrooms if the county ultimately opts to renovate rather than rebuild HCHS.

In a final action, the board unanimously agreed to seek a request-for-proposal for school food ser-

vice, replacing its current vendor. "I'm tired of getting pictures of food that looks terrible," said Garner-Coleman.

The trustees also heard from HCHS student representative Tanaya Brandon, who suggested going back to a hybrid learning schedule to reduce the number of people inside the high school at any given time. Brandon said students are exposed to the risk of transmission of COVID-19 as they are forced to crowd into the narrow hallways of the high school during

class changes. Hybrid learning "will cut down on the number of students in the building and make it easier to contact trace," said Brandon.

While Brandon got a favorable response from School Board members, the recommendation runs counter to a new state law requiring Virginia school divisions to provide five days of in-person instruction, consistent with CDC health and safety recommendations.

While Brandon got a favorable response from School Board members, the recommendation runs counter to a new state law requiring Virginia school divisions to provide five days of in-person instruction, consistent with CDC health and safety recommendations.

While Brandon got a favorable response from School Board members, the recommendation runs counter to a new state law requiring Virginia school divisions to provide five days of in-person instruction, consistent with CDC health and safety recommendations.

While Brandon got a favorable response from School Board members, the recommendation runs counter to a new state law requiring Virginia school divisions to provide five days of in-person instruction, consistent with CDC health and safety recommendations.

Authorized and paid for by Stanley Brandon

Authorized and paid for by Stanley Brandon



New!
Office of Learner Success & Engagement
at the Southern VA Higher Education Center
Providing program information, literacy support services, and assistance with overcoming barriers to program success.
Call 434-572-5566 or email info@svhec.org

MOSER

From page A1

In a separate letter that he submitted Sunday night, Moser informed Superintendent of Schools Mark Lineburg and School Board Chair Kathy Fraley of his decision to resign. In the letter, Moser said he was stepping down with a "heavy heart" and added, "I have and will continue to appreciate the opportunity to serve my district, my community and the students as well as their families."

Moser's letter, which Lineburg read aloud at Monday night's school board meeting, continued, "Due to personal reasons and health reasons I want to spend quality time with my family. With this in mind, please respect my decision and my privacy. I wish the School Board success with moving forward with the tough issues ahead, and also with appointing a successor. Sincerely, S. Todd Moser."

Without comment, the six trustees in attendance voted unanimously to accept Moser's resignation. Also a 6-0 vote, the board named Lloyd as the new vice chair. He was the lone nominee for the position, with Freddie Edmunds making the motion to name Lloyd, seconded by Potts.

ED-7 trustee Keith McDowell was absent from the meeting.

will be cold with highs in the mid 50s.

Volume 153 Issue 88

SERVING SOUTH BOSTON AND HALIFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA SINCE 1869

PANEL

From page A6

Higher sales tax haul lifts school hopes

1-cent county tax on track to raise enough revenue to pay for new HCHS; other revenues, savings eyed for elementaries, pay hikes

By TOM McLAUGHLIN News & Record Staff

Halifax County's sales tax revenue should be sufficient to pay for a new high school — if the Board of Supervisors agrees with the School Board to go that route — and the county would have tens of millions of dollars left over to invest in elementary schools if expiring debt service payments are added to the funding mix.

That was the main takeaway of a Wednesday meeting of the Joint Education Committee, a six-member panel of county supervisors and school board trustees who convened in Halifax to talk about school needs. The meeting served as a preview as both boards prepare for a full joint session next Thursday, Nov. 18 to try to resolve the three most pressing

issues facing Halifax County Public Schools.

That triad of challenges includes what to do about the high school, how to restructure and modernize county elementary schools to serve a declining student population, and how to close the pay gap for Halifax County school employees who trail their peers in neighboring Virginia school divisions.

Part of the puzzle came together on Wednesday with the news that Halifax County will reap more revenue over decades from its 1-cent local sales tax than county officials had recently thought possible. After initially estimating the 30-year sales tax would bring in somewhere around \$3.3 million per year, officials were disappointed when revenues in the first year of the tax came in around \$2.8 million.

"We felt that if we had missed that by half a million dollars, something wasn't quite right," said County Administrator Scott Simpson, speaking about the sales tax revenue shortfall at Wednesday's meeting.

Simpson, who guided the joint panel discussion Wednesday in tandem with Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mark Lineburg, said he and Finance Director Stephanie Jackson began months ago to explore the reasons for the lower-than-anticipated revenues.

He said they discovered the cause: the state tax department has collected, but not yet remitted to the county, sales tax revenue it has received through multiple channels over the past year. The unremitted funds from the state should boost the annual sales tax take by about \$800,000.

"Obviously, that is additional



ED-5 supervisor Dean Throckmorton (left) confers with County Administrator Scott Simpson at the joint education panel meeting.

funds that helps the financial perspective we'll be talking about today," said Simpson, addressing members of the joint education committee: supervisors Dean Throckmorton, Ricky Short and William Bryant Claiborne, and

school board trustees Kathy Fraley, Sandra Garner-Coleman and Jay Camp.

Solely by using \$3.6 million in annual sales tax revenue, instead

See SCHOOLS, page A6

A6

THE NEWS & RECORD ■ SOUTH BOSTON/HALIFAX COUNTY, VA.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2021

SCHOOLS

From page A1

of the prior estimate of \$2.8 million, the county should be able to comfortably borrow between \$92 million and \$102 million for a new high school, depending on interest rates at the time of the debt issuance.

By tapping into another pot of available money — millions of dollars in expiring annual debt service — Halifax County potentially could borrow up to \$142 million for a new high school and elementary school upgrades, without having to touch property taxes.

Debt repayments from the last major round of school facility upgrades in Halifax County — the construction of South Boston and Cluster Springs elementaries, and renovation of Halifax County Middle School, all finished in 2007 — will come to an end in 2027, when the loan on those projects is paid in full. The annual school debt service payments are slightly under \$4.7 million.

That sum is covered with current property tax revenues, mostly drawn from Halifax's 50-cent real estate tax.

Ben Wilson with Davenport Public Finance, the county's financial advisory firm, suggested the two boards could choose any of four scenarios for school construction borrowing. The first scenario is the "base case" — exclusive use of the sales tax to support future debt. The three other options would pair the sales tax with expiring debt service, in three increments: approximately \$2.2 million per year, \$1.9 million, or \$1.7 million.

Under all of the scenari-

os, the county would hold back \$2.5 million in debt service money to cover the county's tax losses when the Clover Power Station closes — revenue that is expected to evaporate in 2028, according to Davenport's projections.

Assuming a loan rate of 3 percent, Halifax could borrow from \$119,795,000 to \$127,970,000, said Wilson, depending on how much school debt service funding is redirected to the HCHS project.

Wilson said Davenport used a 3 percent interest rate in its projections to be fiscally conservative. The Virginia Public School Authority, the state's go-to source for school construction borrowing, currently issues long-term debt at 2.1 percent interest. If Halifax is able to borrow at that lower rate, its maximum borrowing capacity using sales tax and debt service dollars would rise to \$141,920,000.

Borrowing would likely take place in spring 2021. "Rates could move quite a bit between now and then," cautioned Wilson.

The current cost estimate for a new high school is roughly \$118 million. That figure comes from the School Board's public-private partnership construction team, Roanoke-based Branch Builds and RRRM Architects, which have developed a conceptual design for a new high school complex using the \$118 million figure as the guaranteed maximum price.

Under Virginia Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act of 2002 — PPEA for short — construction, architect-

ural and engineering firms can form consortiums to streamline school construction projects and offer localities all-in-one pricing, with the legal requirement to stay under the guaranteed maximum price.

The PPEA building method has pluses and minuses that have been the subject of numerous conversations on both the School Board and Board of Supervisors. Other methods under consideration for a new school are traditional design-build, in which projects are bid out piecemeal, and a blended option — Construction Manager At Risk — that Jay Camp, the ED-4 school trustee, touted at Monday's monthly meeting of the School Board.

Simpson, commenting on Branch Builds' \$118 million price tag for a new high school, skirted a discussion of which building method among the various options is preferable, but he suggested the cost of a new HCHS building would ultimately be lower than the Branch Builds estimate.

He suggested "discounts in design" could shave some \$4.5 million off the price tag, bringing it down to around \$114 million. The need for borrowing could be further reduced in two ways — by committing some \$4 million in federal pandemic relief funding to high school construction, and lopping \$5 million from the project budget for athletic facilities.

Simpson said he views the cost cuts as an "incentive" for the School Board to wring as much savings as it can out of construction of a new high school,



so the items can be added back later.

"The onus will be on the school system to obviously have as much cost savings as possible on the high school project, to be able to do other projects such as sports fields upgrades [and] putting a little bit more into elementary school upgrades," Simpson said.

Simpson suggested his role in the board deliberations is to serve as guardian of the county's fiscal health, so Halifax County will have the ability to respond to future needs — including elementary building upgrades — without overcommitting to the high school.

"My administrative [task] is to try to figure out how we protect our future selves from our current selves," said Simpson.

Ricky Short and Dean Throckmorton, who have expressed repeated skepticism about the need for a new high school, reiterated their opposition to using all of the sales tax revenues on a replacement HCHS building. "I think

it's important we still let our constituents know that not one hundred percent of [the 1-cent tax] is going to go to the high school," said Short.

Throckmorton, citing "the argument from my folks," said he commonly hears the question, "if we've got a declining population and yet we're going to turn around and build a new [high] school, why can't we make do with what we have?"

Throckmorton added he has not seen what he considers to be a solid estimate for an HCHS renovation, but his complaint prompted William Bryant Claiborne to warn against trying to fix a building that likely has hidden problems — a re-prise of the troubled courthouse renovation project, Claiborne suggested.

A new building would give Halifax County a fresh start with a HCHS facility that would last for decades, he said. Comparing a replacement building to a newborn baby, Claiborne said renovations, on the other hand, would be

the equivalent of sinking money into "a 42-year-old man that has aching bones."

"That 42-year-old, if you try to give him new parts, [he's] going to wear out a whole lot faster," he said.

Despite his reservations, Throckmorton signaled acceptance — or resignation — that a new high school will be approved by the two boards. "It's already been decided we're going to build a new high school, apparently," he said.

Simpson suggested Halifax County would ultimately be able to borrow \$140 million, with \$110 million set aside for the high school and \$30 million for future elementary school upgrades.

With a comprehensive project budget in place to meet the school facilities needs throughout the county, "you could easily show the citizens [the money] was going proportionally" to all the schools, Simpson said, with 85 percent dedicated to HCHS and 15 percent to elementary facilities.

The topic of elementary schools touched off a new line of conversation among joint education committee members — led by Simpson and Lineburg, who each suggested that money for higher employee salaries would ultimately have to come from what Simpson called "efficiencies in the elementary school system."

"I think the money to do that [the compensation plan] is in the school system operating budget already," he said.

Lineburg, pointing to public opposition to school closings expressed at the five recent public hearings held at the county's smallest elementaries — Clays Mill, Meadville, Scottsburg, Sinai and Sydnor Jennings — said the School Board has difficult questions ahead pertaining to the county's elementaries.

But, "I think everyone has to acknowledge there are inefficiencies in the elementary schools of \$2.5 million dollars," he said.

Lineburg has proposed channeling these savings into higher school employee pay, which Simpson said is a priority of the Board of Supervisors.

However, "I don't think we're far enough on elementaries to know what we're going to do about that," said Lineburg.

Simpson proposed a work-around that would buy time for a decision on elementary school closings while still allowing the School Board to implement an employee pay scale reform plan, costing about \$800,000 annually. That plan would depend on tapping yet another sum of money the School Board has in reserve — \$3 million-plus in budget carry-over funds. That money ballooned due to lower-than-expected budget expenditures with school closings last year.

See PANEL, page A7

Legal Notice

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC OF A PETITION BY VIRGINIA ELECTRIC AND POWER COMPANY FOR APPROVAL OF A RATE ADJUSTMENT CLAUSE, DESIGNATED RIDER GT, UNDER § 56-585.1 A 6 OF THE CODE OF VIRGINIA. CASE NO. PUR-2021-00083

- Virginia Electric and Power Company ("Company") has filed a Petition for approval of a rate adjustment clause, designated Rider GT.
•Through its Petition, the Company seeks to recover projected and actual costs related to electric distribution grid transformation projects that the Commission has approved as part of the Company's plan to transform its electric distribution grid.
•The total revenue requirement requested for recovery in this Petition for the Rate Year beginning June 1, 2022, is \$55,527,000.
•The Company states that the implementation of the proposed Rider GT on June 1, 2022, will increase a residential customer's monthly bill, based on 1,000 kilowatt hours of electricity usage per month, by \$1.17.
•A Hearing Examiner appointed by the Commission will hold a telephonic hearing in this case on March 22, 2022, at 10 a.m., for the receipt of public witness testimony.
•An evidentiary hearing will be held on March 23, 2022, at 10 a.m., either in the Commission's second floor courtroom located in the Tyler Building, 1300 East Main Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219, or by electronic means. Further details on this hearing will be provided by subsequent Commission Order or Hearing Examiner's Ruling.
•Further information about this case is available on the Commission website at: scc.virginia.gov/pages/Case-Information.

On August 13, 2021, Virginia Electric and Power Company ("Dominion" or "Company") filed with the State Corporation Commission ("Commission") a petition ("Petition") for approval of a rate adjustment clause ("RAC"), designated Rider GT, pursuant to § 56-585.1 A 6 ("Subsection A 6") of the Code of Virginia and the Commission's Rules Governing Utility Rate Case Applications and Annual Informational Filings of Investor-Owned Electric Utilities, 20 VAC 5-204-5 et seq. Through its Petition, the Company seeks to recover projected and actual costs related to electric distribution grid transformation projects that the Commission has approved as part of the Company's plan to transform its electric distribution grid ("GT Plan"). The Company states that Subsection A 6 requires it to petition for approval of a plan for electric distribution grid transformation projects, and also permits the Company to recover the costs of one or more electric distribution grid transformation projects through a RAC.

In Case Nos. PUR-2018-00100 and PUR-2019-00154, the Commission approved Dominion's investments related to eleven projects in years 2019, 2020, and 2021 ("Phase I of the GT Plan"). The Company now seeks cost recovery for these projects through a new RAC designated Rider GT. The projects include: (1) mainfeeder hardening, (2) targeted corridor improvement, (3) voltage island mitigation, (4) hosting capacity analysis, (5) the Locks Campus Microgrid, (6) physical security, (7) the Smart Charging Infrastructure Pilot Program, (8) telecommunications, (9) cyber security, and (10) customer education. The Company states that the Commission also approved the new customer information platform as part of Phase I of the GT Plan, and recovery of those costs is currently under review in the Company's triennial review proceeding, Case No. PUR-2021-00058.

The Company represents that the Commission approved Phase I of the GT Plan projects up to the maximum amount of investment previously deemed reasonable and prudent by the Commission ("cost caps"). The Company further represents that, should costs exceed such cost caps, those costs would be incurred at the Company's risk; it would be the Company's burden to demonstrate reasonableness and prudence for any such incremental investment. Dominion reports that eight of the ten projects are progressing in line with the overall budgetary plan within the cost caps. Two of the ten projects, Locks Campus Microgrid and physical security, have projected costs that exceed the cost caps; the Company asserts that these two projects are still reasonable and necessary to pursue, and the incremental costs of these projects should be approved by the Commission as reasonable and prudent. The Company's RAC revenue requirement includes the Projected Cost Recovery Factor. The total revenue requirement requested for recovery in this Petition for the Rate Year beginning June 1, 2022, is \$55,527,000. The Company states that the implementation of the proposed Rider GT on June 1, 2022, will increase a residential customer's monthly bill, based on 1,000 kilowatt hours of electricity usage per month, by \$1.17.

Interested persons are encouraged to review Dominion's Petition and supporting documents in full for details about these and other proposals.

TAKE NOTICE that the Commission may apportion revenues among customer classes and/or design rates in a manner differing from that shown in the Petition and supporting documents and thus may adopt rates that differ from those appearing in the Company's Petition and supporting documents.

The Commission entered an Order for Notice and Hearing that, among other things, scheduled public hearings on Dominion's Petition. On March 22, 2022, at 10 a.m., a Hearing Examiner appointed by the Commission will hold a telephonic hearing for the purpose of receiving the testimony of public witnesses, with no public witnesses present in the Commission's courtroom. On or before March 16, 2022, any person desiring to offer testimony as a public witness shall provide to the Commission (a) your name, and (b) the telephone number that you wish the Commission to call during the hearing to receive your testimony. This information may be provided to the Commission in three ways: (i) by filling out a form on the Commission's website at scc.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting; (ii) by completing and emailing the PDF version of this form to SCCInfo@scc.virginia.gov; or (iii) by calling (804) 371-9141. This public witness hearing will be webcast at scc.virginia.gov/pages/Webcasting.

On March 23, 2022, at 10 a.m., either in the Commission's second floor courtroom located in the Tyler Building, 1300 East Main Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219, or by electronic means, a Hearing Examiner appointed by the Commission will convene a hearing to receive testimony and evidence offered by the Company, any respondents, and the Commission's Staff on the Company's Petition. Further details on this hearing will be provided by subsequent Commission Order or Hearing Examiner's Ruling.

The Commission has taken judicial notice of the ongoing public health issues related to the spread of the coronavirus, or COVID-19. In accordance therewith, all pleadings, briefs, or other documents required to be served in this matter should be submitted electronically to the extent authorized by 5 VAC 5-20-150, Copies and format, of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure ("Rules of Practice"). Confidential and Extraordinarily Sensitive Information shall not be submitted electronically and should comply with 5 VAC 5-20-170, Confidential information, of the Rules of Practice. Any person seeking to hand deliver and physically file or submit any pleading or other document shall contact the Clerk's Office Document Control Center at (804) 371-9838 to arrange the delivery.

Pursuant to 5 VAC 5-20-140, Filing and service, of the Commission's Rules of Practice, the Commission has directed that service on parties and the Commission's Staff in this matter shall be accomplished by electronic means. Please refer to the Commission's Order for Notice and Hearing for further instructions concerning Confidential or Extraordinarily Sensitive Information.

An electronic copy of the public version of the Company's Petition may be obtained by submitting a written request to counsel for the Company, Vishwa B. Link, Esquire, McGuireWoods LLP, Gateway Plaza, 800 East Canal Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219, or vlink@mcguirewoods.com. On or before March 16, 2022, any interested person may file comments on the Petition by following the instructions on the Commission's website: scc.virginia.gov/casecomments/Submit-Public-Comments. Those unable, as a practical matter, to file comments electronically may file such comments by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the State Corporation Commission, c/o Document Control Center, P.O. Box 2118, Richmond, Virginia 23218-2118. All comments shall refer to Case No. PUR-2021-00083.

On or before January 4, 2022, any person or entity wishing to participate as a respondent in this proceeding may do so by filing a notice of participation at scc.virginia.gov/clk/efiling. Those unable, as a practical matter, to file a notice of participation electronically may file such notice by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the Commission at the address listed above. Such notice of participation shall include the email addresses of such parties or their counsel, if available. The respondent simultaneously shall serve a copy of the notice of participation on counsel to the Company. Pursuant to 5 VAC 5-20-80 B, Participation as a respondent, of the Commission's Rules of Practice, any notice of participation shall set forth: (i) a precise statement of the interest of the respondent; (ii) a statement of the specific action sought to the extent then known; and (iii) the factual and legal basis for the action. Any organization, corporation, or government body participating as a respondent must be represented by counsel as required by 5 VAC 5-20-30, Counsel, of the Rules of Practice. All filings shall refer to Case No. PUR-2021-00083.

On or before January 25, 2022, each respondent may file with the Clerk of the Commission, at scc.virginia.gov/clk/efiling, any testimony and exhibits which the respondent expects to establish its case. Any respondent unable, as a practical matter, to file testimony and exhibits electronically may file such by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the Commission at the address listed above. Each witness's testimony shall include a summary not to exceed one page. All testimony and exhibits shall be served on the Commission's Staff, the Company, and all other respondents simultaneously with its filing. In all filings, respondents shall comply with the Commission's Rules of Practice, as modified herein, including, but not limited to: 5 VAC 5-20-140, Filing and service, and 5 VAC 5-20-240, Prepared testimony and exhibits. All filings shall refer to Case No. PUR-2021-00083.

Any documents filed in paper form with the Office of the Clerk of the Commission in this docket may use both sides of the paper. In all other respects, except as modified by the Commission's Order for Notice and Hearing, all filings shall comply fully with the requirements of 5 VAC 5-20-150, Copies and format, of the Commission's Rules of Practice.

The public version of the Company's Petition and other documents filed in this case, the Commission's Rules of Practice, and the Commission's Order for Notice and Hearing may be viewed at: scc.virginia.gov/pages/Case-Information.

Weather

Cloudy and cool today with highs in the upper 40s. Clearing on Friday, but rain the forecast Saturday. Sunday will be mostly sunny with highs in the mid 50s.

NEWS & RECORD

50¢

Thursday
December 9, 2021

Volume 153 Issue 96

SERVING SOUTH BOSTON AND HALIFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA SINCE 1869

Supes OK new high school, staff compensation plan

After years of wrangling, a \$109 million budget for HCHS rebuild, \$25 million for elementary facilities, and competitive teacher pay – with no new taxes, for now



The long-running debate over what to do about Halifax County High School was settled Monday night as members of the Halifax County Board of Supervisors voted to borrow \$135 million for school construction and create a \$109 million project budget for a new HCHS facility.

Supervisors also approved a school employee compensation package that dramatically raises pay levels of all Halifax County Public School employees with the exception of three Central Office administrators. Excluded from the pay plan are outgoing Superintendent of Schools Mark Lineburg and two interim administrators, Finance Director Robert Aylor and secondary education director Scott Worner.

For all other HCPS employees, the salary increases will kick in early in 2022 and run six months before taking full effect in the next school year. The compensation plan, developed by Lineburg, will make Halifax County school employees among the best-paid in the region and, officials hope, reverse this year's exodus of teach-

ers and other staff.

At the request of School Board Chair Kathy Fraley, supervisors included administrators — both working at the Central Office and school building principals — in the compensation package, after the board's finance committee voted a week earlier to exclude administrative personnel. The finance committee plan addressed only the salaries of teachers and school support staff.

"When we [the School Board] voted in November for the compensation package, we stressed it was for all of our employees," said Fraley, speaking to supervisors Monday night at the board's December meeting. Fraley called the exclusion of principals and other administrators "truly not equitable."

"They are just as valuable as the other employees in our school system," she said.

The net cost of the employee compensation plan is \$1.6 million — after factoring in the payroll savings from eliminating 10 unfilled positions and incentivizing some



Supervisors at Monday night's board meeting in Halifax.

30 long-serving teachers to retire early, opening the way for younger, cheaper replacement hires. To cover the cost of the package over the next two fiscal years, the supervisors voted to allow the School Board to tap \$3.3 million in budget re-

serves that have accumulated with normal school operations curtailed by the pandemic.

The budget reserves will be carried forward to fund the employee pay increases

See SUPES, page A6

A6

THE NEWS & RECORD ■ SOUTH BOSTON/HALIFAX COUNTY, VA.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2021

SUPES

From page A1

through June 2024. After that, the School Board will need to find an ongoing source of money to support the expense of salary hikes — a prospect that likely will require the closing of one or more elementary schools in the county.

To fund the mid-year, six-month salary increases in the current fiscal year — which began in July and runs through June 2022 — the School Board will use nearly \$1.3 million in budgeted funds that otherwise would go unspent.

The short-term savings have built up due to lower-than-expected summer school costs, the use of federal pandemic relief monies to make planned school bus purchases, and other tweaks.

The annual cost of including administrators in the compensation package is \$80,000, which can be found within the school budget, officials said.

The compensation plan passed on a 6-2 vote, with the only opposition coming from Dean Throckmorton in ED-5 and Garland Ricketts in ED-7. Both supervisors objected to granting mid-year salary increases

outside the usual July-to-June fiscal year cycle.

"I think they should be in sync with the budgeting process and not be earlier than that," said Ricketts.

On the subject of the high school, Throckmorton and ED-1 supervisor Ricky Short maintained their opposition to moving forward with a new facility, joined at times by Ricketts, depending on the specifics of the motion that came up for a vote. But their objections were largely swept aside as a majority of the board voted 6-2 or 5-3 to do the following:

» Move forward with borrowing \$135 million to use for long-term capital needs — \$105 million for a new high school, \$25 million for elementary school improvements, and \$5 million to tuck away into a contingency fund.

» Combine the \$105 million in borrowed funds with \$4 million in federal pandemic monies to create a \$109 million project budget for a new high school. The money would also be earmarked to improve athletic facilities, including the Comet football stadium.



Supervisors vote on a series of motions leading to approval of a new high school.

The School Board has been looking at a preliminary estimate of \$118 million for a new HCHS building and other improvements, including new or refurbished playing fields, although officials have voiced confidence they can get the full project done for \$109 million.

» Supervisors also approved the School Board's planned purchase of the Powell property for \$380,000 — with Short and Throckmorton opposing the acquisition. The 12-acre tract, located next to the high school, is envisioned to either be part of the footprint of a new school building, or used for parking or as a construction staging area.

Ricketts joined the 6-2 majority after board members and County Administrator Scott Simpson worked out a provision ad-

ressing how the land purchase will be funded. The \$380,000 will be drawn from the School Board's \$3.3 million budget reserves, and, if the land becomes part of a new HCHS facility, supervisors will reimburse the School Board by tapping the revenues from the county's 1-cent sales tax.

The plan addresses supervisors' concerns that the School Board will purchase the Powell property and then not use it for the new high school.

Supervisors made one other adjustment in the financing of the replacement HCHS and other school construction projects, such as elementary upgrades. At Ricketts' request, the board stipulated that the borrowed \$135 million be divided into two loans — one supported by the 1-cent sales tax and amounting

to about \$100 million, and a second \$35 million note financed with existing debt service monies.

The loans would be bundled together with Halifax County's application to the state's school construction financing pool, which currently lends at a rate of around 2 percent interest.

The full \$135 million debt amount will be financed with the sales tax revenues, supplemented by some \$1.8 million in annual debt payments that can be rolled over after 2027, when the county finishes paying off the debt from earlier school building projects — construction of Cluster Springs and South Boston elementary schools and renovation of Halifax County Middle School, all of which were completed in 2007.

With both pots of mon-

ey, Halifax will have sufficient funding to pay off a 30-year, \$135 million borrowing without raising property taxes, officials say, backed by the county's financial advisors with Davenport Inc.

As board members worked through each question of procedure and scope with the high school project, it was left to Board of Supervisors Chairman Hubert Pannell to draw the years-long HCHS saga to a low-key end.

Addressing the county administrator after the board voted 5-3 to establish a \$109 million HCHS project budget, Pannell asked, "Mr. Simpson, are we through with this and can we move forward?"

"I believe you have addressed everything on this agenda item and can move forward," Simpson replied.

Foot & Ankle Clinic

DR. MICHAEL MARVIN

Podiatric Medicine & Foot Surgery, P.C.

Board Certified in Podiatric Surgery
Complete General & Surgical
Foot Care For All Ages

Most Problems Can Be Treated In Our Office