

**MINUTES OF A JOINT MEETING OF
THE JACKSON BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND
THE JACKSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
HELD ON FEBRUARY 08, 2024**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Joint Meeting with the Jackson County Board of Education on February 08, 2024, 6:00 p.m., at Fairview School Media Center, 251 Big Orange Way, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present:

Jackson County Board of Commissioners:

Mark A. Letson, Chairman

Todd Bryson, Vice Chair

Mark Jones, Commissioner

John W. Smith, Commissioner

Tom Stribling, Commissioner (Via Zoom)

Darlene Fox, Interim County Manager

John Kubis, Interim County Attorney

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Jackson Board of Education:

Elizabeth Cooper, Board Chair

Wes Jamison, Vice Chair

Abigail Clayton, Board Member

Kim Moore, Board Member

Dr. Dana Ayers, Superintendent

Jacob Buchanan, Deputy Superintendent

Cora Fields, Clerk to the Board

Absent: Dr. Lynn Dillard, Board Member

Ms. Cooper called the meeting of the Board of Education to order. She expressed appreciation to the Board of Commissioners for their dedication to the students and their futures. She thanked them for meeting with them to seek better ways to serve the children of the county. They were ready to move forward pending the Board of Commissioners' approval and funding. After their last meeting together, the Board of Commissioners had additional questions. The Board of Education then hired Clarknexsen to do a site analysis at each location.

Mr. Jamison moved to approve the agenda. Ms. Clayton seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

Ms. Cooper led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Letson called the meeting of the Board of Commissioners to order. He stated they were excited to be there and to see what Clarknexsen had to share with them to move forward and get much needed resources to the schools.

Commissioner Bryson moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(1) BUDGET INFORMATION: Dr. Ayers presented:

(a) Operations Budget: \$9,417,613

- Funding Source was the Board of Commissioners
- Most costly item was salaries

(b) Capital Budget:

- Capital Outlay: \$335,000
- Preventative Maintenance: \$375,000
- Technology: \$400,000
- One to One: \$320,700
- Security: \$25,000
- Masterplan: \$130,000

(c) Priorities: The JCPS Board of Education members created an updated priority list last winter:

- 1. Cafeteria and classrooms at Fairview
- 2. Traditional Middle School
- 3. ADA Upgrades/Concession Stand at SMHS stadium
- 4. Track on Jones Street Property
- 5. New Bus garage on current site
- 6. Erosion Control at Scotts Creek *
- 7. Blue Ridge Gym with Performance Space
- 8. Softball Field Upgrades at Webster*
- *These projects could be removed from the priority list if a traditional middle school

(d) County requested information: After the joint meeting on January 31, 2023 and follow up meeting with then County Manager Don Adams, a letter of the requested information was provided to JCPS. The following briefly summarizes the requested next steps:

- 1. Put together a comprehensive student (ADM) count/projection analysis report.
- 2. Create a new athletic field master plan for the Smoky Mountain High School campus.
- 3. Put together a more comprehensive justification proposal for the Fairview Elementary project. This should take into consideration the middle school discussions.
- 4. Put together a more comprehensive plan regarding the middle school project.

(e) JCPS enrollment totals:

- 2019-2020: 3,635
- 2020-2021: 3,571
- 2021-2022: 3,509
- 2022-2023: 3,556
- 2023-2024: 3,547

(f) JCPS enrollment projections:

- 2024-2025: 3,572
- 2026-2026: 3,580
- 2026-2027: 3,616
- 2027-2028: 3,631
- 2028-2029: 3,658

(g) Priority #1 Cafeteria and classrooms at Fairview School: Fairview's cafeteria was undersized and underequipped. Access to the cafeteria was problematic.

- Students with mobility challenges could not navigate the stairwell.
- Those who were unable to use the stairwell must exit outside and navigate the steep ramp outdoors in the elements.
- Fairview's cafeteria served the whole school population of 795 students.
- The cafeteria could only seat 300 students at any given time.

(h) Priority #2 Traditional Middle School: Across the district, excluding Blue Ridge grades 6-8, there were 698 middle grades students.

- FVS 265
- CVS 187
- SMES 112
- SCS 134
- Without a traditional middle school, students lacked opportunities in academics, the arts, Career and Technical Education and athletics. The equitable access to these offerings was marked differently across the district's current middle grades at the elementary schools.
- What could a traditional middle school offer:
 - Advanced Coursework
 - Students with Disabilities/Students at risk
 - Access to Career and Technical Options

- Access to Arts (visual, performing arts, band)
- Teacher Collaboration
- Student Transitions
- Staff Training/Expertise
- Athletics would be a positive extracurricular for middle school students.
- Other extracurricular activities such as robotics could provide opportunities the elementary schools do not have.
- What would happen with vacated school spaces? Pulling middle grades students out of elementary schools would create space availability for other opportunities. The potential for these vacated spaces at elementary schools after the opening of a traditional new middle school included:
 - At Fairview, the kindergarten building could become a full childcare and preschool wing. This would be six classrooms. Currently, there were two preschool and four kindergarten classrooms in the building.
 - Also at Fairview, pods could be remodeled to be appropriately sized classrooms.
 - Empty middle grades spaces at all schools would allow for creation of career exploration spaces as early as 4th and 5th grade.
 - True science labs could be created, especially for 5th grade, which was an EOG tested area in 5th and 8th grades.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Bryson inquired if there was a location identified for a middle school.

Dr. Ayers stated their leadership had been talking about this for a year. She did not have an exact location, but the team believed a location may be most appropriate between Sylva and Dillsboro. This depended on the availability of land and the feasibility of building on the land.

Commissioner Bryson stated he was concerned about parents driving a long distance within the county to a middle school. It could be out of the way for them. Another concern he had was that there would be less opportunities for students to play sports taking away the individual teams at the elementary schools.

Dr. Ayers stated the feeder elementary schools would offer intramural type team sports for students. Also, there were youth and recreation opportunities in the county.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(2) FACILITIES ASSESSMENTS: Chad Roberson, AIA, Clarknexsen, presented the Facilities Assessments:

(a) Overview: He shared graphs associated with different components that were used to measure the success of the schools:

- Schools evaluated using the DPI site and building analysis tool.
- Utilization was done (where possible) to compare the number of students per space profile.
- JC Community School and Blue Ridge do not have a DPI model for comparison.
- Recommendation for Schools and Smoky Mountain High Athletics.

(b) Summary:

- Schools exhibited an average of 110% utilization.
- High utilization/growth in grades pre-k thru 5.
- All sites and structures were average to above average.
- Fairview was most challenged with site constraints, ADA, cafeteria and classroom configurations. Immediate need for new cafeteria, kitchen and minimum of 6+ classrooms.
- Bus Garage should be replaced on site.
- Blue Ridge kitchen/serving line should be addressed.

Commissioner Letson asked if an evaluation had been done on the performing arts and gym at Blue Ridge School as part of this analysis.

Mr. Roberson stated they had looked at that previously, but not with this study. They had done an investigation as to whether or not it would fit on the site and it would. They would be able to add an appropriate sized gym and additional classrooms.

Mr. Roberson continued:

(c) Smoky Mountain High Athletic Assessment site evaluation:

- Site A:
 - Previously graded for future baseball and softball fields.
 - Viable option for eight-lane track and soccer field.
- Site B:
 - Existing baseball field with recently added structures.
 - General area within floodplain.
 - 20 feet+/- lower than existing football field.
- Site C:
 - Existing football field, stadium seating, concessions and restrooms.
 - Field level and existing press box were not ADA accessible.
 - Track did not meet size requirements for competition.
 - Visitor's side needed restroom and concession facilities
 - Existing layout was not adequate for hosting track and field events.

(d) Smoky Mountain High Athletic Assessment Summary:

- Track and Field and Soccer:
 - Build Track and Field at vacant land along Jones Street
 - Utilize existing facility for support spaces.
- Baseball and Softball:
 - Rebuild baseball field, add softball field and renovate the football field house to include support spaces.
 - Retain existing baseball facility.
- Football Stadium:
 - Build new football press box facility, including support spaces for stadium occupant loads.
 - Include Accessible routing to field level.
 - Renovate football field house to include concessions and restrooms for visitor side seating.
 - Add visitor parking and entry at the visitor side of the stadium.
- He provided alternate layouts for review.

Chairman Letson stated he thought the best option was the base layout with the softball field moved with the baseball field so all of the elements were onsite.

Commissioner Bryson stated he agreed with Chairman Letson, he thought they should focus getting the softball field on campus. He liked the base layout option.

Commissioner Jones stated he thought having all on one site, from a safety/transportation perspective was worth the money.

General discussions were held.

(e) Recommendations:

- Fairview was the highest priority. Add a new kitchen, cafeteria and a minimum of six classrooms. Study existing building to determine optimal classroom configuration. Address ADA throughout the school and site.
- Study possible site for future middle school.
- Address Smoky Mountain High athletics.
- Develop a plan for backfilling existing schools.
- Address Blue Ridge kitchen and serving line.

(f) Preliminary Budgets:

| Project | 2024 | 2025 | 1016 | 2027 | 2028 | 2029 | Total project cost range |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Fairview Elementary School | \$1,500,000 | \$10,250,000 | \$12,350,000 | | | | \$24,100,000 to \$30,125,000 |
| Blue Ridge School kitchen/serving | \$375,000 | \$2,562,500 | \$3,062,500 | | | | \$6,000,000 to \$7,500,000 |
| Middle School due diligence | \$120,000 | \$80,000 | | | | | \$200,000 to \$250,000 |
| Middle School | \$251,942 | \$6,046,618 | \$13,856,832 | \$76,842,432 | \$46,36,952 | | \$143,134,776 to \$157,448,254 |
| Smoky Mountain High School | | \$936,000 | \$8,034,000 | \$9,190,000 | | | \$18,160,000 to \$22,700,000 |
| Bus Garage | | | | \$374,678 | \$3,840,456 | \$3,574,801 | \$7,789,937 to \$9,737,421 |
| Totals per year | \$2,248,966 | \$19,877,143 | \$37,305,358 | \$86,409,138 | \$49,979,436 | \$3,576,831 | |

Commissioner Bryson asked if there were grants that could help with the projects.

Dr. Ayers stated they had applied for the DPI Needs Based Grants the last three cycles. \$52 million was the maximum they would give for a middle school project. They could apply again in July and she wanted to apply for one specifically for a middle school.

General discussions were held.

Chairman Letson stated they had done a wonderful job presenting the information. He would like to hear from the players also about moving all the facilities on campus.

Commissioner Bryson asked about sending out a survey to parents about a middle school.

Dr. Ayers stated a survey was sent out in 2016. She would send that information to the Commissioners.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Jones requested Ms. Fox incorporate the numbers for these projects with the revenue streams coming to see what they could or could not do at the budget retreat.

Informational item.

There being no further business, Mr. Jamison moved to adjourn the Board of Education meeting. Ms. Clayton seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

There being no further business, Commissioner Bryson moved to adjourn the Board of Commissioners meeting. Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk
Jackson County Board of Commissioners

Mark A. Letson, Chairman
Jackson County Board of Commissioners