

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF AVERY**

The Avery County Board of Commissioners met in a Joint Meeting with the Avery County Board of Education on Monday, January 26, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Board Room, Avery County Administrative Complex, 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss school related issues.

Members Present: Reo Griffith, Chairman; Maxine Laws, Vice-Chair; Martha Hicks; Faye Lacey; Blake Vance

Members Absent: None

Board of Education Members Present: John Greene, Chairman; Kathy Aldridge; Robert Clark; Steve Smith; Keith Tutterow

Others Present: David Burleson, Superintendent of Avery County Schools; Tim Greene, County Manager; Jeff Jaynes, Avery County Schools Finance Officer; Gerald McKinney, County Attorney

**Call To Order**

Chairman Greene called the Avery County School Board to order at 6:02 p.m.

Chairman Griffith called the Avery County Board of Commissioners to order at 6:02 p.m.

John Greene, Chairman of the Avery County Board of Education, commented that these joint meetings are productive and beneficial to both boards. In most counties across the state you don't find this. We are both charged in taking care of the people of Avery County. Our duties are a little different but we still have the same goals. When we work together we accomplish things more efficiently. We meet on a quarterly basis and break bread helping us build our relationship. I have worked with my Board and Mr. Burleson and they have foremost in their mind the children of Avery County and the citizens at large. What happens in the schools affects the entire county. No one brings personal agenda into the mix of it. We do disagree but we still have the same goal in mind.

David Burleson, Superintendent of Avery County Schools, gave a power point presentation about the Avery County Schools. Mr. Burleson reported that there were six preschool classrooms with over 100 students, five elementary schools, two middle schools and one comprehensive public high school with a freshman academy and a STEM academy. There are 2221 students, 293 exceptional students, 130 English Language Learners. Mr. Burleson spoke about the Blue Ridge Academy for grades 6 through 12 with a maximum enrollment of 60 students and about Scottie, the mobile bus. He also reported that there were 350 full time employees with a total of 492 employees, \$25 million total budget, \$1.4 million monthly payroll, operating 31 yellow buses over 2,300 miles per day. Mr. Burleson also gave reasons why the high school needed to be updated and had a schematic drawing of the updated high school.

Chairman Griffith requested that Mr. Burleson send the power point presentation to the Clerk so that the Board members could have a copy of the presentation.

Mr. Burleson presented letters from some of the students to the Commissioners thanking them for the Ipads that they had received.

Chairman Greene said that our feeling as a Board is that we need to get on with updating the high school if we are going to do it. The building does have a lot of issues. If we don't do what we are proposing here do we want to drop millions of dollars into an old building and still have an old building. Eventually we are going to have to do something. Sometimes tough decisions cost money. Hopefully, we can get together again soon and redevelop the committee that we had to look into the high school and move as quickly as we can.

Kathy Aldridge stated that she thought that we needed to take care of the children. We need to make our children a priority.

Chairman Greene stated that Steve Smith knew every nail that had been put in the school buildings and has saved many dollars because of his knowledge of the construction.

Steve Smith commented that the current high school was done as a showplace in 1965. This is a six cornered building. In the 600 pod of the high school in each one of the six sides a round pipe has been put in by maintenance. We have already talked about some structural engineers the work that they are going to do on the gym they will have to come in and pump some walls. The other two buildings including central service, 300 pod and cafeteria will not go down anymore. The 100 pod and gym are the ones that went down. The other thing when the building was built everything running under it carrying waste away from the building is cast iron pipe with leaded joints. We dug one out across the library and the ground

had shifted and the pipe broke. Some of the pipes are 6 ½ feet deep. The 400 pod is approximately 30 inches from the other pods. That has caused flooding in the back. What gets it is real hard thunderstorms in the summer. Another thing is we have trouble with carrying off of the surface water. That is one of the designs of the new parking lot. Personally, I would like to see a new school at a different location but dollars and cents in Avery County at this time we can't afford it; we can't afford to move to another place and leave the facility. Every child deserves a new high school. The 100 pod has been completely flooded at least three times in the past three years. That is something that no child should have to go through.

Blake Vance stated "if we had had this meeting one week ago tonight I would have said this is something on the horizon that needs to be addressed but I walked through that school on Tuesday and it is embarrassing. Our kids deserve something better than what they have. This has bumped from something that was on the horizon to me to doing something quick. It is dangerous and embarrassing. I would highly recommend that the other board members walk through the high school."

Chairman Griffith stated that the committee has met for 30 months so what kind of dollars are we talking about? Steve Smith stated that it depends on how it is phased. What must happen is a minimum of 30 classrooms must be done and the renovation of the gym at that time. The other part is a stand alone building with all utilities not being tied to the existing building. Ideally that would be phase one. All of that would be on the front of the building and right side of the highway. We have tried our best to pin the architect down. We cannot get an exact dollars and cents. When we tell him what we want as our phase then he will come back and give us an approximate. We have not been able to sit down and decide on what we want as phase one. We are looking at 33 classrooms, interior of the bottom of the gym, auxiliary gym tied into the side of it and boiler room and mechanical room and that would be phase one. Chairman Griffith said that we definitely need some dollars and cents before we can do anything. We absolutely need some kind of figures.

Mr. Burleson said that the Board of Education and Board of Commissioners could get together with the architects and let them bring all of the things that they have and talk through all of the ideas with the phases. Chairman Griffith said that could be possible at some time.

Chairman Griffith stated "concerning the DPI report that was sent back to you in August 2012 and one sentence after the lengthy inspection says 'this building can be deemed for long term use'. After a lengthy inspection there were different issues that needed to be addressed. I would not ask this board to give a consensus without some figures. One problem that I think a consensus of this board is raw sewage running is not acceptable to this Board of County Commissioners. Two board members were there Wednesday morning, Blake was there at some point and I was there Wednesday evening and the janitors walked me through. The sewer was really what was on my mind. This is not acceptable. This has been going on apparently for some time and should have been addressed before now. Has an engineer looked at the sewage problem?" Mr. Burleson stated that when we asked the engineer from DPI to review the building we explained to them that the sewer was concerning. If you read back in that report they say you need to correct this and they did not tell us how. They did not have the means to go in and look at it and see where the problems are. I will tell you the closest we have come to finding some of the problems Darrell Pittman did borrow a camera system and ran it down as far as the camera would go and the light and then it bogs out. Steve Smith said that one problem could not be pinpointed. Steve Smith said that one of the major problems is that the plans for the high school are gone so they have no idea where the lines are. The problem is the entire lines. After the mid 1980's we started working on the sewer system but it has gotten worse over the past three years.

Chairman Greene said that the DPI report did say that the building was usable but there are a lot of buildings out there that are usable but not where you would want your kids. By the time we get this built, the school will be another 6 or 7 years old and by the time we finish it we are looking at 12 years from the DPI report and by that time the building would not be usable to the extent that we want our kids to have a good safe environment.

Chairman Griffith said "he did not know what the future holds. If it was a vote tonight to build a new school and it was going to be 6 or 7 years to accomplish that, we need to fix the sewage problem whether the school is built or not. I think the consensus of this Board of Commissioners is to get an engineer in and find the problem."

Kathy Aldridge, School Board member, stated "one of the things if we fix the sewer we still have safety problems. We had a person come in and look at the building and the way it was set up with all of the corners and where people could hide and that is one of the things we are concerned about is the safety. We have to be proactive in making sure we have a safe school."

Chairman Griffith stated that Mr. Burleson and he would have been working on \$50,000 worth of cameras as we speak to be placed in the high school.

Coleman Bailey, science teacher at Avery High School, relayed some of the issues with the sewer problems in his classroom. He stated there was no ventilation in his labs in the classroom. Chairman Griffith stated that he was going to ask for a consensus of the Avery County Board of Commissioners to direct our county manager to work in cooperation with Mr. Burleson and Chairman Greene to move forward starting tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. getting an engineer in this county and see what can be done to fix the sewer problem at Avery High School.

**Unanimous consensus of the Avery County Board of Commissioners to pay for the engineer regarding the water and sewer issues at Avery County High School.**

Chairman Griffith said that we would have to see where the budget is going and give the Board time to digest all of this. Let's get to the sewage problem now.

Steve Smith stated that when we bring the engineer in and they look at that and they say yes it can be fixed but we are going to rip everything out in these two pods and put in new lines, I think we are wasting money. I think we need an engineer to come in and if we see a place or two but if they come back and need to replace the pipe and replace the floors I think we are wasting money.

Maxine Laws questioned once the engineers come in then what happens. Chairman Griffith said that when the engineering firm has completed its goal, we need 48 hours from the time that it is completed to give proper notice for a meeting and the Avery County Board of Commissioners will meet immediately.

Chairman Greene commented that he would like to get together with the architect and line that up.

Blake Vance said he thought that everyone would like to see what this phase one would cost versus what the "band aid" was going to cost. Chairman Griffith said that the sewer problem had to be fixed immediately whether the school was going to be \$5,000,000 or \$50,000,000.

Mr. Burleson said that he thought the key was to get on this immediately and get the two boards the information about the sewage and then proceed from there.

**Motion by Maxine Laws and second by Blake Vance to adjourn this meeting at 7:54 p.m. Motion unanimous.**

**Motion by Kathy Aldridge and second by Steve Smith to adjourn this meeting at 7:54 p.m. Motion unanimous.**

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**Robert Griffith, Chairman  
Avery County Board of Commissioners**

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk