

A joint work session between the Botetourt County Board of Supervisors and the Botetourt County School Board was held on Tuesday, June 21, 2016, in Room 229 of the Greenfield Education and Training Center, in Daleville, Virginia, beginning at 6:30 P. M.

PRESENT: Members: Mr. Jack Leffel, Chairman, Board of Supervisors
 Mr. Todd L. Dodson, Vice-Chairman, Board of Supervisors
 Mr. Billy W. Martin, Sr., Member, Board of Supervisors
 Dr. Donald M. Scothorn, Member, Board of Supervisors
 Mr. John B. Williamson, III, Member, Board of Supervisors
 Mrs. Ruth Wallace, Chairman, School Board
 Mrs. Kathy Sullivan, Vice-Chairman, School Board
 Mr. Michael Beahm, Member, School Board
 Mr. John Alderson, Member, School Board
 Mr. Scott Swortzel, Member, School Board

ABSENT: Members: None

Others present at the meeting:

Mr. David Moorman, Deputy County Administrator
 Mr. Gary Larrowe, County Administrator
 Mr. John Busher, Superintendent of Schools
 Ms. Janet Womack, Assistant Superintendent of Schools
 Mrs. Betty Holland, Clerk to the School Board

At 6:35 P. M., Mrs. Wallace called the School Board meeting to order. Mr. Leffel called the Board of Supervisors meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Mr. Busher then provided an update on the usage of the Greenfield Education and Training Center. He noted that the County has a long-term agreement with Virginia Western Community College (VWCC) for usage of the ETC. He noted that the College is in the process of changing the programs that they offer at the ETC and will be moving most of the programs out of the facility except for welding classes.

Mr. Busher stated that he recently met with VWCC President Dr. Bobby Sandel about the facility and the school system's use of the lower level for STEM-H classes. He noted that the school system wants to expand their class offerings at the ETC beginning this fall. Mr. Busher stated that this will include the school system opening the building in the morning, while during the evening, VWCC staff will take over the building and be responsible for closing/locking the facility after the last class/event.

Mr. Busher stated that the County's lease agreement with VWCC expires in 2020 and the school system is interested in continuing and expanding the STEM-H classes in the future; however, he is cautious about using a facility that the school system does not own.

Mr. Larrowe stated that he and David Moorman also recently met with Dr. Sandel to discuss the ETC. He noted that VWCC will be transferring some of their assets/staff to the new Virginia Community College System's shared services center in Daleville as of July 1. Mr. Larrowe further noted that VWCC is interested in expanding their workforce certification programs at the ETC; however, the facility will still be able to be used to house corporate office personnel for new businesses such as Eldor Corporation until their facilities are constructed. Mr. Larrowe stated that he will discuss Eldor's office space needs with the company's representatives when they come to the area during the week of July 11.

Mr. Moorman stated that Dr. Sandel indicated that the College is also interested in offering a certified HVAC installation/maintenance program at the ETC and they see a lot of potential at this facility for other workforce certification programs that are not available elsewhere.

After questioning by Mr. Busher, Mr. Larrowe stated that Eldor will need a temporary office location at the ETC while their new Greenfield facility is under construction. He noted that the ETC has been used for this purpose during previous economic development construction projects.

After questioning by Mr. Dodson, Mr. Larrowe stated that VWCC is interested in continuing in Botetourt County after their lease agreement for the ETC expires in 2020. After further questioning by Mr. Dodson, Mr. Larrowe stated that VWCC will continue to staff the ETC when the shared services center opens after July 1.

Mr. Busher stated that the County's STEM-H academy is a vibrant program and the school system is interested in expanding its offerings in the future.

After questioning by Mr. Williamson, Mrs. Womack estimated that there are approximately 75 students in the STEM-H program. She noted that some of the students also participate in dual-enrollment classes at VWCC and receive college credits for those classes.

Mr. Moorman noted that he has heard that VWCC is working with area school divisions to start a new Governor's School program to offer CTE (Career and Technical Education) dual enrollment classes.

Mr. Larrowe then provided an update on the Botetourt Corporate Visitation Program. He noted that the group's last visit was to Roanoke Cement Company on June 14. He noted that several Supervisors/School Board and staff members present at tonight's meeting participated in this visit. He noted that it was interesting to see what is currently occurring at Roanoke Cement, their operations, and the facility's output.

Mr. Larrowe stated that he is working on potential future visits to Gala Industries, Dynax America, Altec Industries, and Metalsa. He noted that the program's participants have increased since its inception and now include representatives from Virginia Tech, VWCC, Dabney S. Lancaster Community College (DSLCC), the Economic Development Authority, Board of Supervisors, School Board, Virginia Employment Commission, the Roanoke Valley/Alleghany Regional Commission, various workforce groups, and County and School staff members.

He noted that it appears that the County has been able to help these companies in some way after the group's visit to their facilities.

Mr. Busher stated that he and his staff have found these visits to be beneficial. He noted that the school system's goal is to make sure that the County's students are being educated to meet the businesses' needs. Mr. Busher noted that, after he questioned the Roanoke Cement representatives, he was told that they contract out their equipment maintenance operations. He stated that the facility operates 24/7 and is a highly technical operation with fewer employees than in the past. Mr. Busher stated that this indicated to him how much technology has impacted employment.

He noted that the Roanoke Cement visit showed him that the schools need to improve their education of "soft skills," e.g., problem solving, communication, and getting along with others. He noted that, besides formal education and training, it is important for today's employees to also have a good work ethic.

After discussion, Mr. Busher stated that they have also had representatives from the County's businesses visit the schools to see what they are teaching today's students.

Mr. Beahm recounted the story of a mechanical engineer at Roanoke Cement who became interested in the occupation through working in his father's garage. Mr. Beahm stated that "there is a lot to be gleaned beyond the technical world."

Mr. Leffel noted that the group's tour guide at Roanoke Cement was a product of Botetourt County and its school system.

Mr. Martin stated that he was told during the tour that Roanoke Cement is in need of welders.

Mr. Busher stated that he extended an invitation to Roanoke Cement to visit the school system and its welding classes when students return this fall. He noted that the County's welding classes need to include problem-solving skills as some welders do not work on an assembly line making the same weld time after time. He noted that welders are needed who can solve a problem that can occur at any time.

Mr. Busher stated that he sees continued opportunities for the school system to work with VWCC and DSLCC on expanding the colleges' program offerings including in the field of mechatronics to better fit the needs of the County's businesses.

Mr. Busher then provided an update on school transportation issues. He noted that the County and school system had been questioned about the possibility of refurbishing school buses to reduce costs instead of purchasing new buses. Mr. Busher stated that he and Mr. Larowe met on May 31 with representatives of Carter Machinery and Blue Bird Corporation at the school bus garage to discuss this issue.

Mr. Busher stated that the Carter representative had major concerns about refurbishing school buses due to the potential for metal "fatigue cracks, both visible and invisible" in a used vehicle's frame. He noted that this situation "lends itself to liability" issues regarding the safety and security of students.

Mr. Busher stated that they also looked into the possibility of purchasing used school buses from other localities. He noted that most localities use school buses until they have over 200,000 miles on the odometer. Mr. Busher further noted that the Virginia Department of Education encourages school systems to retire buses with over 200,000 miles from active student transport operations.

He noted that they have also discussed leasing school buses on a two-for-one basis. He noted that lease agreements are for 7 – 10 years as the average lifespan of a school bus, as per the DoE, is 12 – 15 years. Mr. Busher stated that "when you lease, you have debt" for the length of the lease and this debt could be significant depending on the number of buses that are leased.

Mr. Busher stated that his staff continues to gather data on leasing school buses and will use this information during development of their FY 17-18 budget. He noted that this will include discussions with the County as this will be a debt for the period of the lease. Mr. Busher noted that there are pros and cons to leasing buses. Mr. Busher stated that the meeting with the Carter and Blue Bird representatives was a learning experience for him.

Mr. Larowe stated that this was a good meeting and the representatives provided a lot of answers but they may not have been some of the answers that the County wanted to hear.

After questioning by Mr. Martin, Mr. Larowe stated that he has had some experience with purchasing school buses. He noted that school buses, when purchased outright, are amortized over time (seven years) which is approximately the same period as a lease.

Mr. Larrowe further stated that the Carroll County Economic Development Authority borrowed funds to purchase school buses and the School Board then paid the Authority for these expenditures. He stated, however, that the budget needs to be “built up” to support these cost expenditures.

After further questioning by Mr. Martin, Mr. Larrowe stated that it is not necessarily cheaper to lease school buses but it reduces the up-front costs.

After discussion, Mr. Williamson stated that the cost difference includes the lease’s commercial interest rate (approximately 6% - 7%) versus the rate for the County to borrow the monies to purchase the buses (approximately 3.5%).

Mr. Martin then questioned if there are any documented cases where the refurbished school bus frames have cracked and caused an accident.

Dr. Scothorn stated that “all it takes is one accident” to result in a liability issue and a potential lawsuit.

Mr. Beahm stated that “equipment does not last forever” and “metal fatigue comes into play.”

Dr. Scothorn stated that he is glad that the County looked into this issue and that the public can be made aware of the reasons why refurbishing school buses is not a viable option.

After questioning by Mr. Dodson, Mr. Busher stated that lease agreements are negotiable and could include maintenance-related parameters.

Mrs. Sullivan stated that the school system is still in need of new school buses.

Mr. Swortzel stated that many school systems are removing their buses from service before they reach 200,000 miles. He noted that the County has a lot of high-mileage buses.

Mr. Busher stated that the funding provided by the Supervisors for the purchase of new buses in FY 17 will help the school system tremendously. He noted that they currently use their older buses for parts and have purchased a school routing software module to help their student transportation system to become more fiscally efficient. Mr. Busher stated that the school system has saved \$102,248.60 this year in its school transportation program. Mr. Busher further stated that the school system also has to have the capacity to transport every student home even if that student’s parents normally bring him to and from school.

After questioning by Mr. Williamson, Mr. Busher stated that the Supervisors provided funding in the FY 17 budget for the purchase of three new school buses; however, recent boiler issues at James River High School will necessitate using some of these funds for those repairs. He noted that this will reduce the number of buses to be purchased from three to two.

Mr. Busher further stated that school enrollment is declining and he will know as of September 30 how much State funding will be received in FY 17. Mr. Busher noted that, if the enrollment declines result in reduced State funding, he may have to use some of the remaining bus monies for other expenses.

Mr. Williamson noted that there may be some “play” in the June 30 General Fund Balance.

Mr. Williamson then stated that, several years ago, Roanoke City contracted out their school transportation operations to a private company.

Mr. Busher stated that currently he has direct contact with the bus drivers if a parent has a question or issue with their child’s school transportation; however, if this service is contracted out, he would have to deal with a third party to have these questions/concerns resolved.

Mr. Swortzel stated that if a third-party contractor was responsible for student transportation then the parent's call would go directly to the transportation contractor.

Mr. Busher stated that his staff will consider this option in the FY 18 budget development process.

Mr. Larrowe then noted that he and Mr. Busher recently visited the 4-H Camp at Smith Mountain Lake while 236 Botetourt County children were there. He noted that the classes offered included soft skills such as independence, and training, and many other good quality programs. He noted that the County's participation numbers for 4-H Camp have increased over the past five years.

Mr. Busher stated that this Camp is a good effort between the schools and the County.

Discussion was then held on the date of the next joint meeting.

After discussion, it was agreed that the next joint meeting would be held on Monday, October 3, 2016, with dinner to be served at 6:00 P. M. and the meeting portion to begin at approximately 6:30 P. M.

There being no further discussion, Mr. Leffel adjourned the Board of Supervisors meeting at 7:19 P. M.

Mrs. Wallace then adjourned the School Board meeting at 7:20 P. M.