

Approved 9/21/2009

Minutes of the Special Meeting of  
February 13, 2009

The Union County Board of Commissioners met in a special meeting on Friday, February 13, 2009, at 11:00 a.m. in the Personnel Training Room, Room 131, first floor, Union County Government Center, 500 North Main Street, Monroe, North Carolina, for the purpose of meeting with representatives of the Union County Public Schools regarding reductions to the Union County Public Schools' FY 09 budget because of prevailing economic conditions and taking such actions related thereto as the Board deems appropriate. The following were

PRESENT: Vice Chair Kim Rogers, Commissioner Allan Baucom, Commissioner Tracy Kuehler, and Commissioner A. Parker Mills, Jr.

ABSENT: Chairman Lanny Openshaw

ALSO PRESENT: Al Greene, County Manager; Matthew Delk, Assistant County Manager; Lynn G. West, Clerk to the Board of Commissioners; Jeff Crook, Senior Staff Attorney; Kai Nelson, Finance Director; Dr. Ed Davis, Superintendent of Union County Public Schools; Dr. Mike Webb, Assistant Superintendent for Building Operations; Dan Karpinski, Finance Officer for the Union County Public Schools; David Pope, Director of Planning and Construction for the schools; members of the press; and interested citizens

In the absence of the Chairman, at approximately 11:15 a.m., Vice Chair Rogers convened the special meeting and stated its purpose. She recognized Al Greene, County Manager, for comments.

Mr. Greene said that this special meeting was an opportunity for Dr. Davis to present comments on behalf of the schools regarding reductions to the schools' 2008-2009 budget.

Dr. Davis expressed appreciation to the Board for the opportunity to discuss the impact of the local budget reductions on the schools' operational budget. He said that he recognized and understood the challenges the County is facing with the budget.

He stated that members of the schools' staff had met with the County Manager and members of the County's staff and discussed the County's financial situation. He said that Mr. Greene and Mr. Nelson had done a good job explaining the situation. Dr. Davis said that he along with his staff had completed some detailed analysis of how the schools could do their part in assisting the County to reach its budget reduction goal. He stated that they had met with both the Schools' Budget and Finance Committee and with the Schools' Facilities Committee. He said a good portion of the recommended budgetary reductions affected the schools' capital expenditures.

Dr. Davis said that the School Board had also discussed the impacts of the budgetary reductions on the schools, and the School Board also recognizes that the County is facing a serious situation and there is a need for the schools to do their part.

Dr. Davis stated that the schools would have to look at deferring some capital improvements. He said that the schools have invested a lot of time, energy, and capital in building new schools because of the tremendous growth that Union County has experienced. He stated that the older existing schools also need to be considered. He noted that Piedmont High School was constructed in 1960 and is in need of upgrades. He stated that there were other schools in the Piedmont cluster that also need upgrades, but these would be deferred.

He said that upgrades had been planned this year for the Parkwood school cluster. He stated that Dr. Webb had prepared a cluster "blitz" which was a process whereby the resources were pooled on a yearly basis and a needs assessment was done to review the existing attendance areas to determine which areas are in the most need. He said that they had been able to address some fairly significant needs in the Monroe and Forest Hills cluster this past year. He stated that the Parkwood and Piedmont clusters were the next two that were to be upgraded.

Dr. Davis complimented the schools' maintenance staff, and said he thought they do a good job of maintaining the older facilities. He said they wanted to make sure that there is equity involved even if the students are in the older schools, and that there is a positive, safe, creative, caring environment. He explained that some of the HVAC, electrical, and roof repairs are cost efficient and are investments that would help in the future. He said that there is a series of projects that would be deferred to the budgetary reductions, but the Facilities Committee feels very strongly that these projects need to be done. Dr. Davis said there have been discussions with Mr. Greene and Mr. Nelson, and he knows there is a strong attitude of working together and looking at other possible sources, such as bond savings, that might be used for these types of projects. He said they are looking at possibly completing these projects, but acknowledged that there is no guarantee that the projects could be done.

Dr. Davis noted that the replacement of single pane windows with energy efficient windows at Monroe High School and construction of a canopy and an outdoor learning area at East Union Middle School were recently removed from the Board of Commissioners' consent agenda. He said that the schools learned of the County's budgetary situation and those projects were removed from the consent agenda, and they were being deferred.

He reviewed the impacts of the budgetary reductions on the program areas of the schools. He shared that one area of concern to him is a reduction in funding to assist high priority schools. Dr. Davis explained that the high priority schools are those that have more than 40 percent of the students on free and reduced lunches. He said these are schools with a high concentration of poverty and these schools struggle to meet the requirements of the federal accountability program "No Child Left Behind" and the State accountability program "The ABC's of Public Education." He said that some of the funding for the high priority schools is local, but a considerable amount of the funding is provided by the State. He said that there were some reductions that had to be made in these schools, but they were able to retain the lion's share of funding for those schools.

Vice Chair Rogers asked for clarification that this reduction to the high priority schools would not impact the programs currently in place in these schools but the impact would be to those programs that might be implemented. Dr. Davis responded that this was correct.

Dr. Davis said he was very concerned about what might happen with the state funding. He reiterated that the lion's share of funding for the high priority schools is provided by the State, and there is a risk that there could be a significant reduction in the state's funding in the coming year.

He shared some of the schools' ongoing concerns with Union County Public Schools' continued growth (growth rate was a little less than four percent last year). Dr. Davis said that he thought the growth rate probably would continue to slow down, as this is what they are currently experiencing. He said that Union County Public School system has been the fastest growing school system relative to its size in the State of North Carolina and one of the fastest growing systems in the nation. He stated that three new schools would be opened in the new year (Cuthbertson Middle and High Schools, and Poplin Elementary School). Dr. Davis said that there were certain start up costs associated with opening new schools that are a given such as custodian staffs, field maintenance for the athletic facilities, electrical costs, infrastructure support, and extra local positions to supplement positions provided by the State.

Dr. Davis said that Union County Public Schools already has reverted a little over \$1.5 million to the State for its budget, which is approximately .75 percent of the schools' budget. He shared that he is seeing projections of reductions from the State of

between three and seven percent. He clarified that not all of the state reductions will be monetary but some will be a monetary value based on the allotment of positions, etc. He said that he planned to brief his board on the situation at its work session next week. He stressed that at this point, these are only projections from the state, but he thought some of the neighboring counties are beginning to prepare for the worse case scenario. He said that he thought it behooved the Union County Public Schools to plan for the worse case scenario, and if that does not come to pass, they will be all the better for it. Dr. Davis said that the impacts of the State's budget reductions are unknown at this time.

He discussed the "No Child Left Behind" and "The ABC's of Public Education" Programs. He stated that the citizens of Union County have come to expect high-quality schools. He said that he thought the school system was one of the main reasons that people move to Union County.

Dr. Davis expressed concerns about the 2009-2010 appropriations for the schools. He stated that the schools request that the Board of Commissioners does everything possible to reinstate this funding in the 2009-2010 appropriation as well as at least funding the schools on a per pupil basis at the 2008-2009 rate accounting for the fact that the one-time start up costs are needed for the opening of three new schools.

Commissioner Mills stated that there had been a number of people from the Cuthbertson Road area attend the last Board of Commissioners' meeting and expressed concerns over the closing of the road. He said one of the speakers mentioned the possibility of delaying the opening of Cuthbertson Middle and High Schools. He asked if this possibility had been discussed by the School Board. Dr. Davis responded that this issue had not been discussed by the School Board, that they are moving ahead with the schools, and did not believe that a delay in opening these schools would happen. He estimated that a Certificate of Occupancy would be issued for the Cuthbertson Middle School within the next month. David Pope, Director of Planning and Construction for the schools, concurred that the School Board was close to receiving the Certificate of Occupancy for the middle school, with only a few issues remaining to be resolved.

Dr. Davis stated that there had been a great deal of discussion about the intersection of Cuthbertson Road and New Town Road. He said that the School Board was concerned about the closing of the bridge.

In conclusion, Dr. Davis said that the School Board and staff understand the situation that the County is facing. He said that even though there had been a lively discussion at the School Board level regarding the reductions in the schools' budget, he thought it was the sentiment of that board that the schools needed to do their part, and they were willing to do so. He said that the School Board

requests that the Board of Commissioners not forget that Union County is the sixth largest school district in the State with 38,000 plus students and growing, with the schools' record of excellence and the citizens' high expectations, and that the Board of Commissioners does everything possible to provide what is needed for the schools to provide the quality education with the same caring environment that the students deserve and to which they have grown accustomed.

Commissioner Mills asked if the schools had been able to hire additional school nurses. Dr. Davis explained that the \$1.5 million reversion in funds to the State had impacted the hiring of additional nurses.

Dr. Davis reiterated his appreciation for the opportunity to make the presentation to the Board of Commissioners today and for the Commissioners' service to the citizens of Union County.

Commissioner Baucom questioned if the proposed reductions in the schools' budget met the County's request for \$3.9 million in reduction to the schools' 2008-2009 budget. Dr. Davis responded that the proposed reductions amounted to \$3,928,042.

Vice Chair Rogers said that she had served as a member of the School Board for four years, and she knew the amount of work done by the schools. She said that she knew the budget reductions are not easy, and she expressed appreciation to the schools for working with the Board of Commissioners on these reductions.

Commissioner Baucom echoed Vice Chair Rogers' comments and expressed appreciation to the School Board and staff for their cooperative efforts. He said that these are challenging times for everyone.

Following the presentation, Commissioner Baucom moved approval of \$3,928,042 in reductions to the Union County Public Schools 2008-2009 budget. The motion was passed by a vote of four to zero. Vice Chair Rogers, Commissioner Baucom, Commissioner Kuehler, and Commissioner Mills voted in favor of the motion. Chairman Openshaw was not present.

With there being no further discussion, at approximately 11:40 a.m., Commissioner Baucom moved to adjourn the special meeting. The motion was passed by a vote of four to zero. Vice Chair Rogers, Commissioner Baucom, Commissioner Kuehler, and Commissioner Mills voted in favor of the motion. Chairman Openshaw was not present.