

**AT A SCHEDULED PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED FY 2010-2011 BUDGET
THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY VIRGINIA, HELD IN
THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, 150 SOUTH MAIN STREET
LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA ON WEDNESDAY APRIL 21, 2010 AT 7:00 P.M.**

**PRESENT: CHAIRMAN A.W. LEWIS, JR.
MEMBERS: C.R. COMSTOCK, R.S. FORD, M.R. SMITH, R.H. RIEGEL
CLERK OF BOARD: CLAIRE A. COLLINS
FISCAL DIRECTOR: ROBERT E. CLAYTOR
COUNTY ATTORNEY: VICKIE L. HUFFMAN
STAFF: PENNI MCMICHAEL**

Call to Order

Chairman Lewis called the public hearing to order first calling upon administration for comment. He stressed the budget presented was only a proposal and the Board would not adopt a budget until Wednesday April 28 at 7:00 p.m. Chairman welcomed School Superintendent John Reynolds and the members of the School Board in attendance. Mr. Reynolds briefly spoke to the state fiscal shortfall the School Board encountered and what cuts had been made due to the lack of funding. He also spoke to the consequences of just receiving level funding from the County and how it would impact the next fiscal year. Mr. Reynolds reminded the Board that funding for education is a partnership between the state and localities on behalf of the young people and asked the Board to grant the full funding request from the School Board.

Ms. Collins noted this is the most difficult budget process in the past 22 years with one major factor being the downturn in the economy and there being no flexibilities in state mandates imposed upon the localities. During a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Collins explained in detail all facets of the proposed County budget. Ms. Collins stated the Board started working on the proposed budget last year by tracking the new state cuts which the County had not encountered before. She noted the Board monitored the revenues, both local and state, as well as what revenue would not be coming from the state. Ms. Collins explained the actions the County took in anticipation of the revenue shortfall analysis. She then pointed out the County expense mandates that could not be adjusted. For clarity purposes, Ms. Collins used various charts depicting the revenue and expenditure sides of the proposed County budget. To conclude her presentation, she stated the Board may not have a choice but to: 1) raise taxes/fees; 2) eliminate services and 3) potentially eliminate whole departments.

Public Hearing

Ms. Anne Gale, Kerrs Creek Magisterial District (KCMD), noted she became involved in the budget process with the announcement of the possibility of closing schools. She added that after obtaining from the Treasurer's Office a list (1989-2009) of delinquent taxes owed to the County it totaled \$1,417,338.28. Ms. Gale opined the Board of Supervisors, could fully fund the schools request and maintain the services provided to its citizens without having to raise taxes.

Mr. Jake Lawrence, KCMD and a junior at RCHS, asked the Board to grant the full funding request of the schools so extra curricular activities would continue.

Ms. Marnie Caldwell, Buffalo Magisterial District (BMD), stated that while the closing of Effinger Elementary may be inevitable, she would have no problem if it will make an improvement in educating area youth, but she felt there are a lot of unanswered questions and facts to consider (such as determining the true savings of the closure, taking time to study effects of consolidation, and determining if there is any interest of endowments to establish a charter school).

Ms. Mary Lawrence, KCMD and a freshman at RCHS, advised the Board many students arrive at RCHS tired from the long bus route they have to endure and are unable to concentrate on studies. She invited the Board Members to accompany her on her bus route to school to experience the lengthy ride.

Mr. Skip Hastings, KCMD, suggested the County aggressively collect its arrears and added the delinquency report lists well over 14,000 entries of offenders' names that have not paid in the 1988-2009 time frame. Mr. Hastings stated his opposition of the closure of Effinger Elementary.

Ms. Sandra Hayslette, KCMD, questioned (1) Can Effinger be a fair and economically viable part of a viable school system and (2) What are the costs saving? In her opinion, these questions have not been answered. Additionally, Ms. Hayslette stated she was not comfortable with unfair differential in spending on students.

Mr. Torben Pedersen, Natural Bridge Magisterial District (NBMD), applauded the Board for staying with level funding for the schools because early on in the budget process the Supervisors informed the School Board of the unknown variables of state funding for next year and to anticipate only level funding from the County. He added increasing taxes would only add to the financial hardship many residents are already experiencing.

Ms. Linda Hooks, BMD, suggested the Supervisors provide level funding. In doing so, she stated the School Board would have to fairly fund education. Ms. Hooks noted there are already children having to make long bus trips to school.

Mr. Doug Horan, KCMD, voiced his concern of the analysis that in order to balance the County budget fully funding the school request personal property taxes would have to be increased by 24% or higher the revenue generated would be too much. He suggested having a sunset provision and set a date for reconsideration of County budget versus School budgets. Mr. Horan opined the County side of the budget was not "feeling the pain".

Mr. Roy Fauber, South River Magisterial District (SRMD), stated that according to his research on data from the National Urban Inflation Index (2002-2009) spending increased by 3.8%, whereas county spending during the same period has gone up more than that. He continued by expressing that any tax increase money collected will go into the reserve fund. Mr. Fauber concluded by suggesting there be no increase in taxes and that everyone needs to "roll up their sleeves and cut spending".

Mr. Peter Del Vecchio, Walkers Creek Magisterial District (WCMD), explained the makeup of the recently formed task force in which he is a member. The task force main focus is to delay the closing of schools for a year so alternatives could be explored. He added no one has taken a "hit" like the schools and to only be "flat" funded would be disastrous. Mr. Del Vecchio concluded by expressing that more time to study the situation can be an investment.

Mr. Scott Belliveau, KCMD and Regional Library Board of Trustees President, thanked the Board for level funding for the libraries. He commented library services will not have to be cut and also highlighted some new programs that will be implemented.

Mr. Mitch Wapner, BMD, stressed the importance of quality education for area youths and that research shows that small community schools work better than large consolidated schools. He also added quality educational systems play a large role in attracting economic development. Mr. Wapner questioned what the County considered its long term goal to be relative to future economic development of the area.

Ms. Alice Moore, Lexington resident and involved in education since 1968, urged better management of personnel and more control of spending. She implored the Board to support the needs of county schools and not to close Effinger because of poor decisions made in the past.

Mr. Joe Reinhardt, KCMD, declared his lack of support for raising local taxes and closing Effinger Elementary. He asked for serious consideration of alternatives to closure such as redistricting or establishing a charter school.

Mr. Henry Reife, Natural Bridge Magisterial District (NBMD), commended the excellent quality education being offered to area youths and urged the Board to fully fund the request of the School Board.

Ms. Lenna Ojure, BMD and Washington and Lee University Director of Teachers Education, explained her rationale for keeping Effinger Elementary open by noting especially that to build a quality team of teachers in a school is a very time consuming process.

Mr. Bill Jones, SRMD, commented that some residents are here by birth and some by choice but all have a common interest in what is best for our children. He offered his support of keeping Effinger Elementary open.

Mr. Doug Koogler, WCMD, stated he wants the best education kids can get, but does not want to bankrupt the County therefore he favors level funding for the schools. He also felt it was irresponsible for the Board to advertise a tax increase without knowing the amount of money it would generate and how it would be spent.

Ms. Elise Sheffield, SRMD, emphasized the value of a stable, secure environment in which to educate children. She also expressed her concern of how the Effinger students will be impacted if the school closed. Ms. Sheffield urged the Board to fully fund the School Board request.

Hearing no further comment the public hearing was closed at 8:55 p.m.