

DICKENSON COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD
October 4, 2017
Special Called School Board Meeting
Dickenson Center for Education & Research (DCER)

PRESENT: Susan Mullins, Chairman; Rocky Barton, Vice-Chairman; Shanghai Nickles; Dr. Lurton Lyle; Rick Mullins; Reba McCowan, Clerk; and Haydee Robinson, Superintendent.

ROLL CALL AND MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY CHAIRMAN, MRS. SUSAN MULLINS:

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Good evening everybody. I would like to call this meeting to order and note that all members are present including our Superintendent, Mrs. Haydee Robinson and our Clerk, Mrs. Reba McCowan. We will go ahead and start our meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance and a Moment of Silence. Thank you and please be seated. You have the Agenda before you. Are there any changes, additions or corrections? I will entertain a motion to approve the Agenda?

Mr. Rocky Barton: made the motion to approve the agenda. Dr. Lurton Lyle seconded the motion. All votes aye.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: The Agenda is approved. Mrs. Willis, I will turn it over to you.

Mrs. Shelby Willis: All we need to do is reconvene since we have been in meetings all day. So, I will reconvene our meeting. I note that all of our members are present plus our County Administrator, Mr. Moore, and our County Attorney, Mr. Mullins.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Mr. Yates:

Mr. Larry Yates: Thank you. We just need to reconvene as well. We have been in our meeting already, so we will call our meeting back into session. All of our members are present except Mr. Compton. Our Deputy Director is here as well as Mr. Mullins and our secretary. Our Board has an Agenda before them so I need a motion to approve.

Mr. Talbert Bolling: So moved, Mr. Yates.

Mr. Danny Lambert: I second it.

Mr. Larry Yates: We have a motion and a second to adopt the Agenda. All in favor please say Aye. (All Ayes) We have an Agenda and are back in session.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: The first item on our Agenda is Curtis Elswick, SKANSKA, and I think he is going to do a presentation. Is this a PowerPoint?

Superintendent Robison: Madam Chair, I would just like to take a few moments to welcome Mr. Elswick to our Board Meeting today. As many of you recognize Mr. Elswick, he has been a vital part of our Ridgeview project, and we certainly welcome Curtis here this afternoon. Madam Chair, with your permission I will turn the meeting over to him.

Mr. Curtis Elswick: I know most of you because I have been coming here for the last five years or so working on Ridgeview and the Courthouse renovation. My name is Curtis Elswick, and I am Senior Vice President of SKANSKA. We are a construction management company, and we have been involved with the construction of a lot of schools, courthouses and various types of projects across the State and across the country. I am really excited to be a part of these projects because I am from Buchanan County, don't hold that against me. It just makes these projects more special to me than Virginia Beach or some of the other places I travel. I was asked by the Elementary School Committee to evaluate four potential sites for the new elementary school. What came away from our initial meeting was creating a matrix which some of you have in front of you today. We met maybe a month ago with the committee and reviewed what we had come up with in regard to the information that we had gathered. Tonight, we have updated this matrix a little bit in clarifying some of the things that we had discussed. I just want to mention that I am not here to make any recommendations. I am just here to present the information that we have gathered over the past two months or so relating to the four potential sites that we were given at that time. So, that is what I am here to present tonight. Before I jump into the matrix itself which is the colored boxes here which compares the four different sites, there is some information that I put at the top that I think we should discuss first. (Mr. Elswick reviewed the following; see Attachment 1)

❖ *Attachment 1: Dickenson County Proposed New Elementary School – Preliminary Site Selection Evaluation*

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: The next thing on the Agenda is Public Comment. Shanghai would you please read the Guidelines for Public Comment. (So Read) It looks like I have five names on the list. Is there anyone else who would like to speak who didn't sign up? If so, would you please come forward and put your name on the list. The first name on the list is Mr. Richard Edwards.

Mr. Richard Edwards: Good evening Madam Chair and Board Members. It is an honor to be here tonight. I am here as a businessman from E & S Grocery in Birchleaf, Virginia. We have been in business there for 81 years starting in 1936. We are presently under involvement with the 4th generation. Our family has been major contributors to the schools in the Haysi area for years. I was a major contributor to the schools when I had the Edwards Food Center in Clintwood. We feel like we have done a good job in the county by supporting the local schools, churches and everyone else. The school system has supported us not just by the students but the family members. They have bought things from us, and we appreciate it. We can't make it without each and every one. As you all know, about three years ago the consolidation of the three high schools happened at Ridgeview. It is a beautiful facility. At the beginning of that our sales profits started declining. It hurts when you are a small busi-

ness and operate in an area where you don't have a lot of people moving into the area. We are not getting more people in, but it hurts when you start to lose people. It hurt us tremendously when we lost Haysi High School. The sales from the school, basketball and football games were held right across from our supermarket. The fans who came from other schools stopped at our store. They didn't buy a whole lot, but they shopped with us. In the supermarket business, every penny counts. You have to have as much as you can so that hurt us a lot. It hurt our Sandlick Presbyterian Church the last few years. We were able to send all of our kids from the church to camp because we used the parking area for the church for the people who wanted to park there for the football games. We didn't have that many for the basketball games especially for the playoffs. We raised almost \$2,000 just for parking and donations. It turned out to be very welcome. It worked out very well, and we let them use our facilities at the church. If things change, and Sandlick Elementary is moved, it is going to devastate our store. It will devastate our area. We contribute a lot. We are one of the major sponsors for the sports package at Ridgeview. We contribute not only to athletics but to academics and the robotics team. There are very few things that E & S Grocery has ever turned down from a student who asks. We contribute a lot, and we contribute by our taxes to the county. If it moves out of the area it would definitely be devastating and probably end up closing our store. Mr. Elswick was very kind in his former visits here. I have talked to a few people in the area, and there is a thing that is called a flood wall, I think. Mr. Elswick is probably familiar with those over in Buchanan County. There are a lot of places where they build flood walls. We could build a flood wall around Sandlick Elementary much cheaper than we could do this. We could save a lot of hardships from a lot of the Haysi area. I want to see us stay there. I want to see our store stay there. I want to be able to continue to contribute to the schools. If our profits go away our donations go away with it. Sandlick Elementary School has the water, power and road. There is no such thing as mineral rights because it has been there since 1972. I cleaned the windows there when I was in high school. I know it needs some upgrading, but the flood wall could be a possibility. If someone could look into it, I would appreciate it. I am sure there are some environmental needs that we need to meet. If we could just dredge the river, it could make a tremendous amount of difference there. These are just my thoughts, and I appreciate you all considering them. This isn't just the Haysi area. Please consider keeping Sandlick. It is a great facility, and it hasn't flooded since 1977. It had about two or three feet of water at the most. It is a block and brick building. You can take water and clean up a flood. If the water comes up, you wait for it to go down and clean it up. Our store building has been there since 1948, and it has been flooded five times. It is a brick structure. It needs some work on it, but we are still there in business. We appreciate your concern and thoughts. (Applause!)

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Thank you Mr. Edwards. Next is Mr. Jerry Gray:

Mr. Gerry Gray: Madam Chair, Madam Chair and Mr. Chair it is unusual to be before three elected bodies at once. I have been here long enough to know that there was just one elected body in this room. IDA would have been appointed, and the School Board would have been appointed. We have changed quite a bit. We made a change in Virginia Law that gave citizens the right to elect the School Board but to give the School Board the ability to impose taxes to raise the funds to spend for the job that they have to educate our children. I previously served as the School Board Attorney. I have served on the IDA. I am smart

enough to have never tried to be on the Board of Supervisors. (Ha, Ha!) I don't envy any of you all. And I don't want to offend anyone, but I don't envy any of the elected officials because you answer directly to the citizens. I have talked to people in the past about running for public office. I told them that the worse thing about it is that you get blamed for everything, and you get credit for nothing. I see heads nodding. You know exactly what I mean. I don't envy any of you all for the situation you are in. I want to share something with you. When there was talk about consolidating the schools which has been going on for many, many years honestly in the '70s. One of the goals and thoughts of those of us who supported consolidation was that if we had one high school, it would help unify the county. One of the things as an outsider that I noticed was the disagreements between the three communities in our county. It is something that I never really understood. It helps a little bit that I moved here, I lived on Bad Ridge. It is not bad at all. It is a very nice ridge. I've lived on Mullins Ridge, and I live in the Clintwood community now. This past Friday I went to the football game at Ridgeview, and it was really fun. It didn't hurt a bit that we won, of course. It was particularly nice to see people from all parts of our county cheering for the same team because that is the message that we were hoping everybody would get. I hope that when you all reach your decision that you do it with the sense of unity. One of the things that we can avoid is the stark reality of the fact that our population is decreasing. When I first moved here in 1973 the population was slightly less than 16,000. We had a coal boom and the population climbed to about 20,000. Right now, I bet it is below 15,000. None of us can project what the future holds. Unless folks start having more children or figure out some way to retain the folks that we do educate here, it is something that you can pretty much predict. One of the factors that has to guide your decision is the stark reality that we live in an area where the population is going to continue to decline. What we cannot predict at all is what is going to happen with our economy. I am an optimist and believe that at some time we are going to diversify our economy and take into account that we can no longer rely on coal being the main driver to bring revenue to our community. It has been suggested that whatever decision is made people are going to love you because you are brilliant or they are going to hate you because you are so wrong. I can't tell you what that decision is going to be. Thank you. (Applause!)

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Thank you Mr. Gray. The next name on my list is Josh Evans:

Mr. Josh Evans: Well, Susan, Jerry got Mr. Gray.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Sorry, Mr. Josh Evans.

Mr. Josh Evans: Madam Chair and Members of the Board it is good to see you this evening. As Mr. Gray said, I don't envy anyone sitting behind these tables. I am here tonight, however, and I have been a pretty vocal advocate for the three-school model on the elementary school level. I am a Guardian ad litem in the 29th Judicial Circuit that is the court appoints an attorney for a child in lots of different types of cases but primarily where a child is at risk for abuse and neglect or for some other reason. When I, as an attorney, go before the judge I am expected to give that judge vital information about children who are subject to abuse or neglect, have been abused or neglected or for other unfortunate circumstances. So,

the judge and other attorneys at the table are to make a decision about what is in their best interest. In my opinion and in my brief experience, I have been practicing law almost five years now, the small school model works in Dickenson County. We have many children who are born substance exposed. We have many children who are moved by the Department of Social Services because of drugs or other harsh economic circumstances, and if you have a small school system you have a teacher who has an intimate, one-on-one relationship with that child. In my opinion, a 20 student or less classroom is so important to that child especially on the elementary school level. To have that one-on-one tenderness and educational level experience means the world to a child going forward and as they progress in their educational career. I go into each of our elementary schools regularly. We have outstanding people, principals, guidance counselors and teachers. I didn't really realize it until I got into this job how vital they are to the children's lives. They spend seven or eight hours with that child. In my opinion, I don't know what you paid for this study, but any licensed contractor could have told you that it would cost approximately \$200 a square foot to build a school. I do know, and I think Mr. Barton made the best point here tonight, that when this plan was adopted by the Corps, it was promised to the business owners and the citizens of the Haysi community and the Ervinton community that they would keep their school. Not only do I believe that you should hold to that promise, but I also believe that it is in the best interest to the elementary school children of this county, not just Haysi or Ervinton or Clintwood, to maintain what you've got and what you've got is a good thing. You have incredible teachers, you have incredible parents and you have incredible students. (Applause!) Based on the numbers, I believe the Backbone Ridge site is the cheapest site. It is the best site for transportation, economics and the best interest of the children. It is not for the best interest of Dickenson County's economics, and it is not (no offense Mr. Nickles) for the best interest of a district but it is for the best interest of the children. I ask you to make it work somehow for the three-school model. The financial picture speaks volumes. I think Mr. Yates pointed out that if you do it at one site for all three schools it would be for 900 pupils which would cost \$27 million. It doesn't make sense for the bus routes or the classroom sizes. That is my position as not only a parent, or an advocate for children in the court system but as a business owner in the county. It would scare me to death to be a business owner in the town of Haysi right now. The Autumn Fest that you all had down there was unbelievable. The trails are doing great. Haysi is doing great, and those children down there are doing great. They have a good school there so I ask you to make the three-school model work somehow. Thank you. (Applause!)

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Thank you Mr. Evans. Next is Mr. Matt Owens:

Mr. Matt Owens: I have no comment.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: So you wish to remove your name?

Mr. Matt Owens: Yes.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Next is Mr. Carroll Edwards:

Mr. Carroll Edwards: Actually, I have a hearing aid and I am having a rough time understanding the meeting. If I understand it right Ridgeview is out of our budget, we don't have the money. Is that right? We don't have enough Corps money to do it at Ridgeview. Is that right?

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: I don't think we have come to any conclusions.

Mr. Carroll Edwards: Are you saying that we have enough money to build a small one?

Mr. Curtis Elswick: You have to figure out how small. You can't build one with 900 students.

Mr. Carroll Edwards: Do you have enough money to build the one at Clinchco? You don't know? Well we do know that we have enough money to build one at the two locations at Haysi. We do know that we have enough money to build one in the Sandlick district. So I recommend that you pick one of the sites at Haysi and go forward. Don't do any more studies or nothing. Just pick one of the sites and go forward because that is the right thing to do for our kids. It is the right thing to do for the citizens who were promised from day one that that is where it would be. If you want to do the right thing for the kids and for the citizens and for the communities, you will build it at one of the sites in Haysi. Thank you. (Applause!)

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Finally I think it is Mr. Billy Stiltner:

Mr. Billy Stiltner: Rainwater Ramsey was my great, great, great grandfather and he built the first school, Big Oak School, in Dickenson County. It is four miles from the Big Oak School to Ridgeview as the crow flies. That is all I know about that. I have a suggestion for the old school, not the annex, but the new part of the high school be donated to the Indians and let them put a casino in there. It will bring more money into the community. (Applause!)

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: I believe that brings us to the conclusion to Public Comment.

BOARD COMMENT:

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: That brings us to Board Comment, and I will begin with Mr. Nickles:

Mr. Shanghai Nickles: Well I am for the three-school model. I don't want to see Ervinton lose their school. I don't want to see Haysi lose their school, and I don't want to see Clintwood lose their school. It all comes down to the dollar. I don't want to go to the voters and ask them if they will support Ervinton Elementary School or Haysi or whatever. It comes down to what you can do with what you have left

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Mr. Barton:

Mr. Rocky Barton: Reba can probably tell me if I am wrong but to date this has been going on for almost three years now. We have not had one person come and stand before us and say that they are for consolidating elementary schools. Not one. I have had some folks say that out of convenience, I have one at Sandlick and two at Ridgeview, and it would be a lot easier for me to go to one place or another. The Board of Supervisors endorsed three schools. They even started a Capital Account to fund improvements at Clintwood Elementary School and at Ervinton Elementary School. The IDA voted for the three-school model. The Chamber of Commerce and numerous clubs and organizations want the three-school model. I am about keeping our communities open. Let's show people that we are still open. Let's go the extra mile to keep these three schools open. I know that when the enrollment gets to a certain point at Ervinton, we will have to look at something. We will know that when it is time. Right now, in Pre-K they have 121. We have a 22-year life mine that is going to go into that area when coal prices are right. That is 200 employees. Fifty or sixty of those employees could be new hires. You know that when they put in new mines, they bring in a lot of guys. That area has a potential of growth more than any area right now. The age of a miner is the age where you have kids. We may have 10 or 20 move back into that area that has kids. The mine is supposed to be where Ervinton High School is. I think we have to do that. We sold this project to our county. There are three original Board Members here: me, Susan and Dr. Lyle. We voted twice. When we voted for the Backbone Ridge site, there wasn't an issue of consolidation. It was just an issue of where in Haysi the school was going to be built. It was never told to us in the beginning that it would be anywhere else. As a matter of fact, we looked back and Dr. Askins at the time said that it would be a deal breaker if the schools had to consolidate. I could have never supported consolidation of our high school if I had known for a minute that we would end up not having our community hub. (Applause!) As much as I love Ridgeview and as much as I support it; we counted just off the top of my head, I didn't buy a \$20,000 score board like the other guys did, but it is \$5,000 a year already that we have put into Ridgeview for season tickets, passes, yearbook ads, football programs and whatever. We support it, and our community is going to keep on supporting it. If we are denied this elementary school, financially, like Richard said we won't be able to support nor will we want to. I think people will change their mind about support. It is working at Ridgeview, and it is all good. So, why change any of that? (Applause!)

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Dr. Lyle.

Dr. Lurton Lyle: I also support the three-school model elementary school system. My original comment was because of the projection of the student enrollment that it may come to the point that it would not be economically feasible to keep a smaller school going. At that point, the possibility of a two-school system would be my observation. As long as we get the support of the Board of Supervisors to keep that school going, I would not be in favor of closing any of the elementary schools. That is my point.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Mr. Rick Mullins:

Mr. Rick Mullins: I don't think there is anyone in this room who is against the three-school model. I feel I have a responsibility to each taxpayer in Dickenson County to take a good, long look at this for viability of our school system for the next 30 years. I want to be able to

know how much gas, electricity and what the cost of that building is going to be. I want to be able to put every child whether it be Sandlick, Ervinton or Clintwood on the same level playing field. I have three grandchildren who are in the Clintwood Elementary School. My wife and I can be there in two minutes. However, if the true viability shows that the school needs to be at Ridgeview, Sandlick or wherever, that is how I will vote because this is not about Rick Mullins. This is about every single person in this room and every child. Thank you.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: The only thing that I would add is that we have to look at the now, but we also have to look at 10 years from now and 30 years from now. The other thing, Mr. Mullins, is that we are at the end of our Agenda. Do I let the IDA and the Board of Supervisors conduct their meeting or do I adjourn?

Mr. Scott Mullins: Well, if we are at the end of our meeting, I think you could do it either way. You could allow them to do their closing comments and all adjourn at one time, or you could adjourn now.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: I think that would be the nice thing to do. Mrs. Willis do you want to take over?

Mrs. Shelby Willis: I think we will just adjourn because we already discussed everything this morning.

Mr. Ron Peters: I would just like to say that I am for the three-school model. I am new to the community, and I agree with Rocky that the 30-mile ride is excessive. What I am hearing from you folks is the social impact it would have on your community. We need to look at that. To address what you said Shanghai, I am okay with us trying to figure how funds to make the repairs that need to be done. I also want the money to be set aside to go for those repairs. I sat in the School Board meeting and I recall hearing and watching the discussion about moving the money into the Operation Budget. That roof has been talked about for five or six years or longer. I am willing to support that we just need to make sure the money goes into the fund for it. Thank you.

Mr. Shanghai Nickles: Mr. Peters I am not the only one who feels that way. Thank you. Can I say something else? I want to thank the members who supported the new program for the Athletic Department at Ridgeview High School. Thank you, guys. I appreciate you.

Mr. Jason Compton: For two years now since I have been on this Board I have been torn between consolidating the schools or having the three-school model. Mainly the consolidation thought was based on the money only. But after the information we have received and the affect it has had on the businesses it has had at Haysi, Ervinton and everywhere, I would support the three-school model also. I think we need to move on this as quickly as possible because the problem we are running into is if we wait another year or two before we make this decision, it will be millions of dollars it is going to cost the taxpayers. Based on the information stated I think there is only one area that it needs to go, and the quicker we move on it the better.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Mr. Yates:

Mr. David Yates: I am probably in a unique position. I think I have students attending all three elementary schools. You can't support one without supporting the other. From the beginning, I have maintained the three-school model. I continue to do so. I think it is best for the students and for the communities. I will stand by that even if it takes extra tax dollars to do it and support it. (Applause!)

Mrs. Shelby Willis: I don't think there is anyone in the room, and it is your decision to make where the school goes. I think all of us are for the three-school community provided we can afford to keep up those three schools. We don't know where our income is going to be coming from in the future. We don't know if we are going to have coal severance for our budget or not. I don't know if there is anyone who isn't for a school in each community. I always said that Haysi should have the school first. (Applause!)

Mr. David Perry: You know there is an emotional piece to it and a financial piece to it. It is a difficult decision. I am for the three schools if we can afford it. That is my fear. We don't know what it will look like 10 years from now. Based on the current enrollment numbers and our continuing slide in enrollment I think we are avoiding the inevitable. That is my only concern.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Mr. Yates, I am going to turn it over to you. Did you want to adjourn your meeting?

Mrs. Ginger Senter: I move we adjourn Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Danny Lambert: I second it.

Mr. Larry Yates: We have a motion on the floor and a second. All in favor say Aye. (All Ayes)

Mrs. Shelby Willis: I just want to say that I am for the three schools, but I would hate for my children or grandchildren to go to a dilapidated school and other students in a new school. Do I hear a motion to adjourn?

Mr. David Yates: So move.

Mrs. Shelby Willis: Is there a second?

Board of Supervisors Member: I second it.

Mrs. Shelby Willis: All in favor say Aye. (All Ayes)

Superintendent Robinson: Madam Chair, this is nothing to do with the current discussion, but I see several gentlemen here on behalf of the School Board and School Division to rec-

ognize. As many of you know we have had an interesting week at Ridgeview. I would like to ask Sheriff Hammons to please stand. (Applause) Scott Stanley and Jarrod (Applause) Madam Chair, these gentlemen were there on Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and they will be there tomorrow. I can't be prouder to work with the kind of people we have in the police department. I just want to say a sincere thank you and all of our gratitude for all that you have done to keep our children and our staff members safe. (Applause!)

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: Thank you Mrs. Robinson and I want to thank you too. I also want to say that we work with them daily at Social Services, and they are wonderful. They go with us at any time. I know they are overworked, but they are always willing to help. They are a great group of people, and we are lucky to have them.

I will entertain a motion to adjourn this meeting.

Dr. Lurton Lyle: made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Rick Mullins seconded the motion. All votes aye.

Chairman, Mrs. Susan Mullins: This meeting is adjourned.

Adjourned: 6:49 p.m.

Susan Mullins

CHAIRMAN

Approved: October 25, 2017

Reba McCowan

CLERK