

**Camden County Board of Commissioners  
Camden County Board of Education  
Joint Meeting  
February 13, 2023  
5:30 PM – Closed Session  
6:30 PM – Open Session  
Camden County Public Library**

A joint meeting of the Camden County Board of Commissioners and Camden County Board of Education was held in the Boardroom of the Camden Public Library at 5:30 PM on February 13, 2023. The primary purpose of the meeting was to discuss matters relating to the construction of the new high school.

**Board Members Present**

Board of Commissioners: Chair Tiffney White, Vice Chair Ross Munro, Commissioners Randy Krainiak, Sissy Aydlett and Troy Leary.

Camden County Board of Education: Chair Jason Banks, Vice Chair Chris Purcell, Board Members Kevin Heath and Magen O’Neal. Board member Christian Overton joined by conference call.

**Others Present**

Camden County – County Manager Erin Burke, County Attorney John Morrison, Clerk to the Board Karen Davis.

Camden County Schools – Interim Superintendent Dr. Travis Twiford, Attorney Johny Hallow, Administrative Assistant Anita Cuthrell.

**Call to Order**

Chair Tiffney White called to order the Camden County Board of Commissioners and Vice Chair Chris Purcell called to order the Camden County Board of Education.

**Consideration of the Agenda**

Commissioner Leary offered a motion to approve the agenda as presented. The motion passed with all commissioners voting aye and no commissioner voting no.

Board of Education member Kevin Health offered a motion to approve the agenda as presented. The motion passed with all board members voting aye and no board member voting no.

**Closed Session**

Commissioner Aydlett offered a motion to go into Closed Session to consult with the attorneys in matters relating to attorney-client privilege. The motion passed with all commissioners voting aye and no commissioner voting no.

Board of Education member Magen O’Neal offered a motion to go into Closed Session, which was seconded by Vice Chair Purcell. The motion passed with all board members voting aye and no board member voting no.

The Boards went into Closed Session to consult with the board attorneys in matters relating to attorney-client privilege.

At the conclusion of the Closed Session, Commissioner Aydlett made a motion to come out of Closed Session. The motion passed with all commissioners voting aye and no commissioner voting no.

Board of Education Vice Chair Chris Purcell made a motion to come out of Closed Session, which was seconded by Board Member Magen O’Neal. The motion passed with all board members voting aye and no board member voting no.

**Reconvene**

Chairs Tiffney White and Dr. Jason Banks reconvened the Board of Commissioners and Board of Education respectively.

**High School Facilities Discussion**

The discussion centered around questions from the boards to MB Kahn representatives Bill Cram and Maggie Dittmar in regard to the budget analysis for the construction of the new high school.

Maggie Dittmar began by providing clarification on the comparison of the proposed high school in Camden to the school in Alamance County. She explained that it is difficult to compare two projects that are bidding and budgeting at different times periods. The Alamance County project was bid over two years ago, prior to the inflation that took place during COVID.

Commissioner White questioned the salary overhead.

Mr. Bill Cram explained in an effort to be completely transparent, the salary overhead includes salaries, taxes, benefits, vehicles, travel expenses as appropriate. The figure will be refined as the project gets closer to a start date.

Commissioner Krainiak questioned the cost per square foot in comparison to the project in Alamance County and other areas in northeastern North Carolina.

Mr. Cram explained that they start off with a summary-level estimate and work off of square-foot numbers, not a lot of detail. They received input from 30-40 subcontractors and vendors in this area to assist in the budgeting process. When the project is ready to go to bid, each portion of this project will be competitively and publicly bid pursuant to North Carolina General Statutes.

Commissioner White questioned the \$2500 cost of the office trailer.

Mr. Cram explained that it will be at least a double-wide or possibly a triple-wide office trailer to have enough space to hold subcontractor meetings on site, likely 40-50 people at a time, until such time the project is completed sufficiently to hold the meetings within the building.

Dr. Jason Banks questioned the escalation figures and how it ties in to the bid process.

Mr. Cram explained that at the time the estimate was prepared was about 12-14 months timeframe before the bids. As inflation drops, it doesn't mean that prices are doing down; it just means that prices are not going up as fast. When the project actually goes to the bid market and they receive actual pricing from the bid contractors, there will no be a line item for escalation. The guaranteed maximum price will be in place at that time for inflation or escalation. At that time every bid will be reviewed to ensure that the contractors have included the entire scope of the project. Again, this process is followed pursuant to the requirements of the North Carolina General Statutes.

Commissioner Munro inquired as to how often the contingency funds are returned. Mr. Cram stated that it is rare to not have funds to return to the agency.

Commissioner Aydlott questioned in regard to the contingency funds for the library project. Mr. Cram stated that the library project was bid at an unusual time and there were some issues. In addition, this project took place during rapid inflation and at a time when the construction industry was extremely busy and it was difficult to find some contractors that were interested in a small project.

Commissioner Munro inquired as to the capacity of the current construction plan. The current construction plan is at a capacity of 600 students. The current number of students is 614, which means 'as is' the new site will open over capacity.

Commissioner Munro raised the concern that with the awarding of each new grant, the budget of the new school consistently grew by the same amount as the grant.

County Manager Erin Burke stated that the recommendation at the Board of Education meeting was that the Board of Education should seek the full \$83 million, which would be the entire amount allocated through bond referendum and grant funding. It may not be the full project scope according to the current budget, but the recommendation to receive the full \$83 million would be essentially allocating the full \$83 million to the project. Whether or not the project costs that much, we don't know. But if we allocate the full \$83 million to the project, we have no way of reining that back in and protecting the taxpayers.

Ms. Dittmar explained that when the program was getting started, the budget was much higher than the original budget. There were additional pieces of the project such as athletic fields and others that would potentially be bid as alternates to get into the budget that was allocated by the County Commissioners at that time, a smaller grant with the \$33 million loan. In order to build a high school within that budget, the team was working through cutting

scope. When additional funding became available, the team was asked to do a new estimate, about a year later. An additional budget was again requested for the new grant, including more escalation built in. It was not the team's goal to create a project that costs \$83 million; it was the team's goal to create a project that will accommodate more than 600 students.

Dr. Banks added that the interest rates were a reason the team was asked to put together the budget for that time.

Mr. Purcell clarified that the \$73 million would allow the addition of the extra classrooms to plan for growth, along with one other item for programming.

Dr. Banks stated that at the next board meeting, the Board of Education will be looking at options and ranking priorities for adding items back to the plan. Increasing capacity is the consensus among the Board of Education members as a priority.

Mr. Purcell added that \$73 million, \$50 million in grant funds and \$23 million in loans, would provide a school with a higher capacity than originally planned, and also bring the bond referendum at \$10 million under what was originally authorized by the vote.

Mrs. Burke stated that if the \$73 million build a high school with classrooms that will move us into the future, that would be the way to move forward. It is important to guarantee that we will not open the doors to an over-capacity building.

Mr. Purcell inquired as to when the Board of Education could expect to get the final budget from the County to finalize the plan to move forward.

County Attorney John Morrison stated that it would be appropriate for the boards to discuss the final budget allocation and Board of Education Attorney Johnny Hallow agreed.

It was decided that after the Board of Education's next meeting, there will be a better idea of exactly what is being requested.

Mr. Cram offered for the team to return to conduct a workshop as the project moves forward.

There was brief discussion in regard to technology, which is also included in the scope, including installation and infrastructure. It is his recommendation that those items not be selected until later in the project so as to ensure the most up-to-date technology will be installed in the new school.

Mike Lawrence requested to address the Boards. His question was in regard to the taxes already being collected for the school.

Commissioner Munro confirmed that the money is still in the appropriate account and has not been spent on any other purpose.

Mrs. Burke clarified that there are two separate funds; one for operational expenses and one for high school construction. The funds have been collected, but have not been spent. The county to date has spent just over \$3 million on the project, not including the land purchase. While those monies are growing, the county has also spent General Fund monies for the design project.

Mr. Purcell questioned that if the amount for the loan comes in a \$23 million versus \$33 million, if there will be a tax deduction.

Mrs. Burke indicated that that will be a discussion for the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner White responded in that it will depend on a decision of the Commissioners at that time.

#### Adjourn

There being no further matters for discussion Commissioner Aydlett offered a motion to adjourn. The motion passed with all commissioners voting aye and no commissioner voting no.

Board of Education Vice Chair Chris Purcell offered a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Board member Kevin Heath. The motion passed with all board members voting aye and no board member voting no.

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 PM.