

A joint work session between the Botetourt County Board of Supervisors and the Botetourt County School Board was held on Monday, June 29, 2015, in Room 229 of the Greenfield Education and Training Center, in Daleville, Virginia, beginning at 6:30 P. M.

PRESENT: Members: Dr. Donald M. Scothorn, Chairman, Board of Supervisors
Mr. Jack Leffel, Vice-Chairman, Board of Supervisors
Mr. Billy W. Martin, Sr., Member, Board of Supervisors
Mr. Todd L. Dodson, 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
Mrs. Kathleen D. Guzi, County Administrator
Mr. John Busher, Acting Superintendent of Schools
Mrs. Betty Holland, Clerk to the School Board

At 6:32 P. M., Dr. Scothorn called the Board of Supervisors meeting to order. Mrs. Wallace then called the School Board meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Dr. Scothorn stated that he hopes that this is the first of many joint meetings between the Supervisors and School Board members. He noted that it is important for the citizens to see how these groups work and, while there will be more specific dialogue on issues impacting both boards in the future, this meeting is to provide an overview of the Supervisors recent strategic planning process.

Dr. Scothorn stated that the Supervisors and County staff participated in strategic planning sessions in late 2014 and early 2015. He noted that these were the first sessions of this type held in many years. He noted that there were some frustrating moments but it was a great opportunity to watch the strategic planning process happen. Dr. Scothorn stated that the Board and staff members were divided into separate teams in different rooms but many of the same ideas were brought forth by both groups. He noted that the Board is looking toward the growth and development of the County in the same way.

Dr. Scothorn stated that this evening's meeting is informal and he encouraged the School Board members to ask questions on the items being presented.

Mrs. Wallace stated that she is pleased to have both boards finally come together and agree on a date for this meeting. She noted that both the School Board and the Board of Supervisors should work very closely together for the benefit of the County as the schools are a very important aspect of the County. Mrs. Wallace stated that she and the School Board are pleased with what has happened and is happening in the County and want to become partners with the Supervisors. She stated that both groups will share their thoughts and questions at this meeting and create a dialogue to allow them to move forward.

Mrs. Wallace stated that this is the kickoff of several meetings to come in the future. She noted that, at the end of this meeting, the group will be asked to choose a date for their next meeting, decide on the specific discussion areas, and "how we will move forward."

Mr. Martin then provided an overview of how the Supervisors selected a facilitator for their strategic planning sessions. He noted that the Board members have held many discussions on where they wanted to go, what they wanted to do, and what they wanted to look at

regarding planning for the County's future. He stated that the Board held a strategic planning session several years ago without a professional facilitator but the Board did not follow through on the discussion topics. Mr. Martin stated that the Board agreed in 2014 that a professional facilitator needed to be hired for these planned strategic planning sessions. He noted that having a professional oversee this process allows everyone to participate equally in the discussions.

Mr. Martin stated that development of a strategic plan takes commitment and extra time on the Board members' behalf but it is well worth the effort. He noted that all of the Board members came together and developed one plan for the County's future with participation and input by various County staff and department heads.

Mr. Martin stated that he and Mr. Williamson worked with the staff to find, interview, and recommend a facilitator for the full Board's consideration. Mr. Martin noted that he and Mr. Williamson interviewed two individuals and chose one that let the Board members ask questions of her as well as her asking questions of the Board. He noted that the facilitator had experience in local government and, once hired, met individually with the Board members to ask questions about the Board member and become familiar with their plans and ideas for the County.

Mr. Martin stated that it is important that the facilitator's objectives and the Board's objectives are the same. Mr. Martin stated that the facilitator was very professional, thorough, and "delivered the goods."

Mr. Williamson stated that, as part of the strategic planning process, the staff was also asked to provide the Board members through their DropBox account with various information and reports on the County. Mr. Williamson stated that former School Superintendent Dr. Tony Brads told him that he (Dr. Brads) thought it was important that the School Board know what the Board of Supervisors were doing. Mr. Williamson encouraged the School Board to think about a strategic planning process of their own.

Mr. Williamson stated that the Board's strategic planning process was conducted in two parts that were spread over two weekends. He noted that one session was understanding the data (environmental scan) on the County. He stated that the staff spent 3 – 4 months developing data on land use, financial trends, demographic trends, economic development trends in the County, region, and nationally, prior to these meetings being held.

Mr. Williamson stated that the goals developed need to be grounded in reality. He further stated that Dr. Brads participated in one of these work sessions. Mr. Williamson stated that he thought it was a highly successful process as the Board received good data to review and there was a reasonably balanced level of understanding for all members of the Board and staff.

Mr. Williamson stated that, at the second session, the Board and staff were divided into teams in order to develop a vision/mission statement and the strategic priorities.

Mr. Alderson then questioned whether there was a "clear path" laid out as to how the Board could achieve their goals and aspirations after this process.

Mr. Williamson stated that this is still a work in process. He noted that the Board has developed goals and a vision statement and the staff is still working on putting together the budgetary impacts and time lines for the priorities.

After questioning by Mr. Swortzel, Mrs. Guzi stated that strategic planning is an on-going process. She noted that work is underway on many initiatives and funding is included in next year's budget to continue the progress. Mrs. Guzi further stated that the County is still working with the facilitator but we do not have a long-term contract.

Dr. Scothorn stated that the Board members debated on how far into the future they wanted to envision the County and decided on 25 years (2040). He noted that their vision statement reflected this time period.

Mr. Leffel stated that he thinks that the most important thing from the strategic planning session was, when they left the final retreat, they left as a very united Board, had total trust in each other, and were “all on the same page.” He stated that it was a very good session especially the work in creating the vision statement. Mr. Leffel stated that the Board spent a lot of time, both at the strategic planning sessions and since the sessions ended, in discussing schools.

Mr. Leffel stated that to have a vision you need to know where you were, how you got there, and where you want to be in the future. He noted that the County’s history indicates that there have been many times when the County and its officials have been leaders. Mr. Leffel stated that the County’s school system says a lot about our culture and who we want to be 25 years from now. He noted that it is important to have the necessary people to get us there.

Mr. Leffel stated that his vision is to bring the County back to the top in agriculture and he believes we can achieve that. He noted that, during the strategic planning process, the Board held a lot of discussions about schools and an aging County population and the need to have more children in our schools and more young adults living in the County. Mr. Leffel stated that the County needs to do things that we have not done before to have young families who want to live here.

Mr. Leffel stated that the Supervisors and School Board are the only elected boards in the County and it is our responsibility to jointly move the County to its rightful place in the future. He noted that “we are charged to do this.” Mr. Leffel stated that this is not a complicated issue—both boards need to get to a place and be productive similar to what occurred during the James River High School renovation project. He noted that the James River project could not have happened without real rapport from both boards and a common goal. Mr. Leffel stated that, by both boards working together, millions of dollars were saved on this renovation project.

Mr. Leffel stated that the Board is committed to moving forward with the school system.

Dr. Scothorn stated that the Board members became a united group during the strategic planning process even though they may still disagree on some matters. Dr. Scothorn stated that the Board and School Board need to work together and unite to show the County’s citizens what we can do to work together for the County’s future.

Mr. Dodson stated that Mr. Martin previously discussed the hiring process for the facilitator. He stated that this process helped to focus the Board to know where they were, so that everyone was on the same page and at the same starting point, and to allow them to decide where they want the County to go in the future. Mr. Dodson stated that the Vision Statement, copies of which were given to each person in attendance, was developed to show where the Board believes that the County should go.

Mr. Dodson stated that some Board members wanted the Vision Statement to be for a 5 – 10 year period but he pushed them to think about the County in 25 years. He noted that the facilitator helped the Board to develop this vision. Mr. Dodson then reviewed the Vision Statement and the focus areas—Thriving Business Environment, Gateway Center, Botetourt Cool, Responsible Governance, Ample and Reliable Infrastructure and Facilities, Responsive Government, Lifelong Learning Excellence, and Strategic Land Use.

Mr. Dodson stated that development of each of these focus areas was very deliberate on the Board’s part. He noted that the latter part of the second retreat session allowed the Board

to develop strategic priorities for each focus area and these 40 priorities will help accomplish their vision for the County.

Mrs. Guzi stated that the staff worked to ensure that funding for the strategic priorities proposed to be implemented in FY 16 was included in the budget. She noted that staff developed a specific road map for each priority, e.g., as the Exit 150/Gateway Center marketing study which included hiring a consultant and developing tasks and timelines so that the study could proceed.

After questioning by Mrs. Sullivan, Mrs. Guzi stated that timelines were synthesized for the 40 priorities to determine what could be funded in the FY 16 budget. After further questioning by Mrs. Sullivan, Mrs. Guzi stated that the staff is developing the action plan for these priorities and the Board will then review the timelines to determine if these items are proceeding as planned.

Mr. Martin thanked the staff and department heads for their hard work in getting these action plans and timelines developed.

After questioning by Mr. Alderson, Mr. Dodson stated that the Board is “still at the front gate” on this project and it will take time to plan, budget, and implement all of these priorities. Mr. Dodson further stated that the Vision Statement is a living document which needs to be reviewed and adjusted when conditions change.

Mr. Alderson acknowledged that a lot of work is necessary to develop this type of foundation for the County’s future.

After questioning by Mr. Alderson, Mr. Dodson stated that staff is charged with developing the budgets to achieve the 40 strategic priorities.

Dr. Scothorn stated that it is the County’s job to ensure that the citizens and students are “top notch” in the State and it is the Supervisors’ and School Board’s job to ensure that they are leading Botetourt County together.

Mrs. Wallace stated that the school system would also like to be able to keep their staff by offering competitive wages. She further stated that the School Board is very dedicated to the County’s educational process and they provide for all students no matter their learning level.

Mrs. Wallace then introduced Mr. John Busher as the school system’s interim superintendent. She noted that Mr. Busher was a member of the school system staff for many years.

Mr. Busher then stated that he has been an educator for thirty years at all levels from teaching to administration. He noted that since 2000 there have been two school accreditation processes in Virginia—State and federal. Mr. Busher stated that these guidelines set limits as to what students are required to be knowledgeable about at the end of certain grade levels and this was a big “curveball” to the State’s school divisions.

Mr. Busher stated that he retired from the Botetourt County school system two years ago and has been working with the State Department of Education since that time.

Mr. Busher stated that schools should consider three issues--safety, facilities, and are the kids being prepared for life of being productive citizens. Mr. Busher noted that the life of a child today is not the life that he learned in school. He noted that we are in competition with other schools and other countries in educating children.

He noted that the school staff should pay attention to each child’s learning aptitude and determine what skill sets the individual child needs to know in order to be successful in their world. Mr. Busher stated that he believes that schools should intervene in a student’s education as early as possible so that remediation efforts are not necessary in the future.

Mr. Busher stated that professional development opportunities (skill sets) for teachers are also essential. He noted that the school system needs to take stock of what teaching methods work and protect those initiatives. He also stated that the schools need to determine if they are providing for those kids that think things through differently and are problem-solvers. Mr. Busher stated that “outside-the-box thinking” is needed. He noted that today’s kids’ world is technology-driven—their world is not our world.

After discussion, Mr. Busher stated that the common/core principals of what a child, student, adult, and citizen will need to go forward in the world need to be emphasized. He noted that the recently implemented federal Common Core standards have taken teaching back to the era of a “problem-solving” educational format.

He noted that technology will be a constant in the future and connectivity is important for the students, teachers, and the school system. He further noted that children are used to finding the answers to their problems on-line but they have to be thinkers as well. Mr. Busher stated that the school system also offers opportunities for gifted students as well as dual enrollment classes and the Governor’s School which encourages students in problem-solving activities.

Mr. Busher then mentioned the STEM-H program (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, Healthcare). He noted that there are more jobs and opportunities available in the country’s healthcare industry than ever before due to the aging population. He further stated that several Craig County students attend high school classes offered by Botetourt County that are not available in Craig County.

After discussion, Mr. Busher stated that both the School Board and Board of Supervisors are essential and important to each other and he is pleased that this conversation (joint meetings) are occurring. He noted that Botetourt County is a piece of the old world in the modern world. Mr. Busher stated that he agrees with the Supervisors members comments that you have to think ahead. He noted that the State Department of Education requires that the schools also think ahead by requiring them to conduct biennial planning. Mr. Busher stated that you can have the best data and the best plan based on this data but what is the capacity of the staff to carry out the plan and is additional training necessary to do so.

Mr. Busher stated that he was pleased to see “lifelong learning” as one of the Supervisors focus points in their Vision Statement. He noted that the School staff and the County staff have been working together on ways we can partner including recycling, parks and recreation/ballfields, etc.

After questioning by Mr. Alderson, Mr. Busher stated that he has not been back with the school system long enough to determine what is lacking. He noted that groundwork is needed and the people in the classroom need to understand what the school is doing, what their role is, and whether they have the training to carry out their plans and goals for teaching students.

Mrs. Wallace stated that professional development is important as is the school system’s ability to maintain the staff once they are trained.

After questioning by Mr. Dodson, Mr. Busher stated that the school system’s annual planning extends out for a five year period. He noted that they also meet with County business representatives to find out how former students are doing in their work for these companies and if changes are needed to ensure a more work-ready employee.

Dr. Scothorn then thanked Mr. Busher for his comments.

Discussion was then held on the future plans (topic and date) for the next joint meeting.

Mr. Alderson stated that, because of budget restraints over the past few years, the schools have genuine needs that have been delayed/deferred which need to be addressed including buses, school roofs, and salaries. He noted that data on these items has already been prepared and presentation of this information to the Supervisors should probably be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

Mr. Williamson stated that he is a “data guy” and looks forward to hearing this presentation.

Mr. Alderson stated that these needs are “big dollar amounts” and he is not suggesting that they be addressed in total in the next budget process but a plan is needed on when and how to fund these items.

Mr. Williamson stated that information on the competitiveness of the County’s teacher’s salaries and the implication of recruitment and retention efforts should also be discussed.

After discussion regarding the timing of the next joint meeting, Mr. Martin suggested that the meeting be held in 60 days. After review of schedules and discussion of several dates, it was agreed that the next joint meeting would be on Monday, August 31 at 6:00 P. M. at the Greenfield Education and Training Center.

There being no further discussion, on motion by Mr. Martin, seconded by Mr. Dodson, and carried by the following recorded vote, the Board of Supervisors meeting was adjourned at 8:25 P. M. (Resolution Number 15-06-20)

AYES: Mr. Williamson, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Martin, Mr. Leffel, Dr. Scothorn

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

ABSTAINING: None

Mrs. Wallace then adjourned the School Board meeting at 8:26 P. M.