

April 22, 2008

At a reconvened meeting of the Board of Supervisors of Prince Edward County, held at the Court House, thereof, on Tuesday the 22nd day of April, 2008; at 7:00 p.m., there were present:

William G. Fore, Jr.

Sally W. Gilfillan

Robert M. Jones

Charles W. McKay

Howard F. Simpson

Lacy B. Ward

Mattie P. Wiley

Absent: James C. Moore

Also present: Wade Bartlett, County Administrator; and Sarah E. Puckett, Assistant County Administrator.

Chairman Fore called the meeting to order, stating that this is the date and time that has been advertised for the public hearing on the overall Prince Edward County Budget, to include the Prince Edward County Public Schools, for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2008 and ending June 30, 2009.

“This is the first time the Board has taken the opportunity to conduct a combined public hearing on both the overall county budget and tax rates, and the school budget. We believe this consolidated public hearing is a good idea for the citizens, so that you, the citizens, can correlate the funding for the schools with overall county budget and the setting of the tax rates.

“The proposed budget, as advertised, includes the following highlights:

- Level funding for the School Operating Budget, which includes a 3% salary increase for teachers and employees;
- Level or decreased funding in the operating budgets of County departments and Constitutional Offices;
- A 3% salary increase for County employees;

- Level funding of donation requests to agencies supported by the Board, with no anticipated funding for new requests; and
- Level funding for the County's volunteer fire and rescue units.

"Last year, Prince Edward County had substantial real estate and personal property tax increases and the Board is working very hard this year to avoid the need for a similar increase this year.

"The advertisement for the Budget does include tax increases. The increases had to be advertised in the event the public desired to increase expenditures over the advertised amounts. The advertised tax increases are:

- A five cent increase in the County's Real Estate Tax, from \$0.57/\$100 to \$0.62/\$100 of assessed value;
- A fifty cent increase in the County's Personal Property Tax, from \$4.50/\$100 to \$5.00/\$100 of assessed value;

"However, the budget, as advertised, is balanced and requires no increase in taxes. If the citizens of Prince Edward County wish for the Board to increase expenditures in the proposed budget, that will require an additional resource requirement and an increase in taxes.

I will now open the floor for public comment. Let me start with the names that are on the sign-in sheet. To give everyone an opportunity to speak, I ask that you limit your comments to three minutes."

Chairman Fore then opened the public hearing.

Barbara Arieti, Hampden District, said there is a saying that "when times get tough, people turn to guns and religion. But I will say that when times get tough, I think we ought not to turn away from public education." She said the discussion as reported in the Farmville Herald was disappointing and depressing. She said the Board of Supervisors should be blamed if a balanced budget can't be achieved, but it would be extremely dangerous to balance a budget at the expense of the school employees. She said the county appears to be prosperous with the growth and development, but is the prosperity real if the school employees have their salaries reduced in "real-spending dollars." She said that County Administrator Bartlett's proposed budget includes a 3% raise in December, equals to a 1 1/2 % increase for school employees as opposed to receiving the increase in July. She said since inflation is now high, it would actually receive a substantial decrease in real salary, and gave an example of someone earning

\$40,000 given a 5% increase would equal to \$2,000. She said that would not equal the same as the property tax increase. She said many think teachers are merely highly paid babysitters, and she invited those to shadow a teacher for one day. She said she is sure their opinion would change.

Teri Kidd, Farmville District, said many details have been presented to the Board, and Dr. Watkins has high visionary goals that were implemented her first year with the district, and the school system needs the funding to follow through. She said she is concerned that there never seems to be enough funding without raising taxes, but said if that's what it takes, the Board should do it. She said in the past, the Board has always worked hard to avoid the December 1 salary increase date, and that it would be a short-term fix which would actually be a step backwards. She said the county needs to stay level, if not ahead, of the competing counties. Ms. Kidd said Amelia County is offering 4% to its teachers, and Prince Edward County is losing teachers to the surrounding counties. She thanked the Board for sticking with the teachers and finding a way to fund the salary increase on July 1.

Jim Ailsworth, Farmville District, said he is a business owner and taxpayer, and also Chairman of the Prince Edward Public School Endowment Association, which assists the schools financially. He said all have tough decisions to make; the additional funding that Dr. Watkins requested is a fair amount and said the Board needs to endorse and grant the request.

Rev. Kitty Smith, Hampden-Sydney, said she is the Executive Director of HOPE Community Services, but she was in attendance to represent education. She said she visited the schools to give a presentation and found the young people and teachers alike were interested. She said she was impressed by the youth's zeal and enthusiasm, and impressed with the teachers and the school system. She said last year's property tax increase shocked her, but that if taxes have to be raised again to fund the education, the Board should do it. She said she wants her Social Security check to be delivered by someone that can read, and if she needs to see a doctor in Prince Edward County, she wants the doctor to be certain of the difference between penicillin and aspirin.

Sam Williams, Farmville District, said it would be right in stating that he is the only one in the room that had gone from first grade to twelfth grade in Prince Edward County. He said he observed educational development in the County, and is elated with Superintendent Watkins' proposals, such as security and expansion of the curriculum. He said there is now a connection between the high school and

Longwood University, and there needs to be a high level of competition in academia, and the students need to be ready. He said the world should know that the students come out of Prince Edward County academically sound, educationally well-structured, competent and able to do the work that society demands. He strongly urged the Board grant the schools' request.

Barbara Rice, Hampden District, said she moved to Prince Edward County 12 years ago because of the school system. She said the elementary and middle school teachers have devotion and commitment to the children of the county, and need to be compensated. She asked the Board to support their budget.

Rebecca Carwile, Lockett District, asked the Board for their support for the proposed school budget. She said she is in favor of raising real estate and personal property taxes if necessary, as education is the best investment anyone can make. She said she moved to Prince Edward County from a neighboring county because of the elementary schools, and she is glad she did. She added the neighboring counties are paying their teachers more and have received more grants, but within the last two years, Prince Edward County schools have been doing great things. She said she was ecstatic to receive the grant which will generate secondary expenses not precisely covered by the grant's provisions, for instance, there is a need to step up the curriculum to ready the children to take advantage of the programs, and to seek every funding opportunity available. She said safer schools are necessary, as is paying the teachers a competitive salary. She added quality teachers push the children to reach their potential. She said her three children have benefited from the special education and gifted services offered by Prince Edward County schools. She has a personal interest in the schools, as does every citizen, and a strong school is the single most unifying factor in any community, and the benefits of a strong school system outweigh the costs. She asked the Board to support the proposed school budget.

Dr. Walter Bortz, President of Hampden-Sydney College, said the college depends upon the schools for so many different things, not just the students, but also because the college recruits faculty and staff based on the quality of the schools. Hampden-Sydney College enjoys interaction with students at the schools. He said he was in attendance because of the quality of Hampden-Sydney College has been enhanced tremendously through the work and the effort of the teachers in the public schools, and supports the proposed budget.

Samuel Trent, Leigh District, said he is in support of the proposed school budget, because if the county wants better students, better teachers and schools are necessary. He said the citizens need to support the children as our children are our future.

Dr. Deneese Jones, Farmville District, said during her three years as Dean of the College of Education and Human Services, she became aware of the tremendous and increasing ties that are held with Prince Edward schools, and was happy to declare that the multiple partnerships not only benefit Prince Edward County students, but the Longwood Future Educators as well. She said they function as co-partners in the educational experiences of the Prince Edward Public School children, and the Longwood University candidates in preparation to become teachers, educators and administrators. She said they share knowledge through formalized partnerships and practicum, internships, and student teaching experiences through after-school enrichment and tutorial programs through technology focused activities and skill-building on Saturday afternoons, through leadership preparation with public school administrators, and faculty-staff decision making strategies for both entities. She said within the last year, the partnership experience was established to recruit, prepare and places African American males in elementary classrooms. She said they are especially excited about a recent joint effort to work to connect the middle school curriculum and instructional practices with the families and community. She said learning is the primary purpose of schooling, and it makes sense that student learning be at the center of the school's goals. The goals outlined for the Prince Edward students are indicative of centered focus. She said she is pleased with the goals set by Dr. Watkins. She said students who are most at risk of receiving an inadequate education are often the ones most jeopardized by short-sighted objectives. She said the six major goals established are fine models of the comprehensive view of student learning that takes into account the influences on achievement. She said she and the College of Education and Human Services at Longwood University support these best practices, and the practical nature of each goal, and hopes that the Board can see their educational merit.

Patrick Murphy, Prospect District, said he applauds the teachers and volunteers for their service to the youth and to the community. He said he is a member of the working class and must constantly scrape for money for our children's and community's endeavors. He said due to inflation, money is not plentiful in anyone's pocket, with the rising costs of fuel, food, maintenance and infrastructure, the

purchasing power of every individual has been reduced. He said the proposed County budget is balanced with level funding, and a 3% increase for the teachers; he said he charged the Board months ago with balancing the budget, and they have. He said he must work two jobs to keep his family afloat, and as head of household, draws a budget at the beginning of each year. He said if taxes are increased to raise teachers' salaries from 3% to 5%, it would cancel the budget he established for his family, for a second year in a row. He said unfortunately some cannot read the newspaper where some of these things are advertised, and that is an atrocity. He attempts to prepare himself financially for the tax burdens that do come, and the significant increase that was put in place the previous year was to help stabilize the budget. He said this year, a 3% increase in teacher's salaries, a decrease in county salaries, and maintaining public safety is acceptable. He said he realizes the teachers have a tough job, but a 3% increase as opposed to a 5% increase is better than none. He asked the Board to maintain the 3% increase in the budget.

Joyce Seymour-Hawkins, Meherrin, said the schools have offered her children many things. All of the teachers and staff have touched her children's lives, and they were known by name, not an ID number. She said she appreciates what the teachers have done for her children, and asked the Board to give the increases asked for in the proposed school budget, and to show they care about the children of the county.

Mary Prevo, Farmville District, said she agrees with the people in support of the proposed budget and supports raising taxes to do so. She said she was attending to ask the Board for their support of the library, which enables lifelong learning. She said as Treasurer of the Central Virginia Regional Library Board, she wished to thank the Board for its assistance in improving library services which in turn increased public support over the past five years. She said 10,000 individuals in the last year were patrons of the library, and if the rate of growth continues, the library will need to serve approximately 12,000 to 13,000 over the next few years. She said an additional \$3,666 was requested to enable the library to increase hours of operation by increasing staff hours. She said state funding mandates for books and supplies; local support is used primarily to pay staff salaries and to cover other overhead expenses such as utilities. She said the amount allocated to the library by the localities goes into a formula which determines what is given in state aid. Ms. Prevo listed the services offered by the library at no cost, and asked the Board to support the library and its growth.

Jimmy Garnett, Lockett District, said he congratulated the Board on making the Prince Edward County Schools in the top 20% of all Virginia school systems for funding. He said Prince Edward County Schools are the top one or two in the local counties in funding per student. He added the difference between the 3% and 5% increase is minimal, but it would cost approximately \$800,000 if that was given per year for the County and the school system. He said he agreed with Mr. Murphy that times are hard in Prince Edward County, and asked the Board to support level funding.

Rucker Snead, Hampden District, said he is in favor of the proposed school budget. He said great strides have been made by the Board of Supervisors and the School Board, but there is still a way to go to improve the schools. The schools are still not fully accredited which means they are not meeting the minimum standard of educating some of the children. He added the citizens are willing to pay to gain and retain teachers, and pay more to meet more than the minimum standards. He said he understands the challenges and the uncertainty of the economy, but to cut back and wait it out would hold Prince Edward County back, as the rest of the world will not wait. He said the county is growing, and must prepare for the global knowledge-based economy, and companies looking to open in Prince Edward County expect great educational opportunities for their children and the children of their employees.

Saranna Thornton, Farmville District, said many behaviors require collective action. Providing public education is important; an individual can supplement their children's education by hiring a tutor or by sending them to academic camps, but the quality of education in a community has direct effect on the quality of life for everyone in the community. She said better educated citizens are less likely to be unemployed, abuse alcohol or drugs, or commit crimes. Higher educated people earn higher incomes and can pay higher taxes. Globalization is coming and the children must be well-educated. She said not doing so invites disaster. She stated that she read in the Farmville Herald that if the raise is given, the Board would have to raise taxes. She said the increase in salary would not be eaten away by the tax increase, and by not authorizing the 5% increase, the Board would be authorizing a pay cut for the teachers. She said it was also reported in the Farmville Herald that retail sales hit another record which means more money for the county. She said an editor's opinion in the paper stated that colleges and universities do not shut down and do not move overseas. She said if the county does not have good public schools, the college, university and hospital are not going to be able to recruit staff in a national market, and asked the Board to raise taxes.

Dr. Patricia Watkins, Superintendent of the Prince Edward County Schools, said the entire school is committed to providing the best education to the children. She said the article in the newspaper said the proposed budget was level-funded but included a 3% increase for school employee's salaries, and wanted clarification. Mr. Bartlett said based on figures provided by the school, the increase in the state funding is enough to fund the 3% increase in salary.

Dr. Watkins said the increase in the state funding cannot fund a 3% salary increase for the entire staff, July through June. The school district has the largest [number of] employees in the county. Dr. Watkins said there had been a small increase in basic aid, and there were some decreases in the budget. She said that based on comments that were made, level funding and a 3% increase were confused. Mr. Bartlett said that was correct; there was not enough for 3% from 1 July 2008. He said that was the reason it also stated it would be effective 1 December 2008. Dr. Watkins said if the school takes the small increase in state funding [and apply it to salaries], that the money would not be available to provide the security on the buses, AP at the high school, and other programs. Mr. Bartlett said that would be the school's decision; he said Dr. Watkins provided him with a figure of \$827,000 for a 5% increase for the whole year, and only requested a \$512,000 increase in local funding, and the other \$300,000 must come from the state. Dr. Watkins said the 3% increase is mentioned but it is not funded by the county.

Beulah Womack, Hampden District, said she is a retired educator from New Jersey and was on the school board for 25 years, and is an advocate on the local and national level for public education. She said she supports the proposed budget; good planning is not enough, and the initiatives require financial support. She said whenever the bar is raised for academic achievement at one level, it has a spiraling effect. She said the community must have patience and allow the plan to work, and that Prince Edward County is going in the right direction. She said the Board needs to invest in the county's children and support the schools. The safety, improved academic achievement, staff training, hiring and retention of highly qualified teachers and staff are paramount, and provide the continuity that is so important. She said the Prince Edward County public schools initiatives warrant support and approval of the budget, and she implored the Board to support the schools and the children.

Brian Burns said the Board needs to work hard to do its homework as his five children must. He said, "To quote the old moniker, if you think education is expensive, try ignorance." He said the county

needs to educate the members of the community for the future. He said it is of paramount importance that education is taken seriously, and that it is well documented that those with a high school diploma will earn more than high school dropouts; those with a college degree will earn more; education is the way to a better future. He said today's children will someday take care of the community that the current Board of Supervisors worked hard to build. He said it is good business to have good education.

Virginia Dillard, Leigh District, said the school provides many services to the community, and the all of the staff and teachers impart knowledge to the students so that they may grow up to be upstanding citizens in the community. She said the children are the county's most important asset and it would be negligent not to give the employees what they deserve, and supports the proposed school budget.

Ruth Allen said she is in support of Dr. Watkins' and the proposed school budget and the Board would be remiss if it did not support the schools. She said Dr. Watkins cannot provide the best possible education without a sufficient budget, and the Board needs to show they care about the county's children and the community as much as the citizens do.

Carl Burda, Hampden District, said a 5% raise was given last year and he has not seen improvements. He said taxes on a house valued at \$150,000 would be \$706, and the proposed increase would raise the taxes to \$930. He said there is more to running a community than just a school. He said he commended the teachers for the job they do, but the school employees should be happy with a 3% increase.

Mr. Moore entered the meeting at 8:20 p.m.

Harry Rousch said he was disappointed to hear the public speak in support of the teachers but not other staff, such as bus drivers, who have no benefits such as insurance or retirement plans. He said other school districts in the surrounding localities have full insurance and retirement for their bus drivers. He said he approves of the proposed school budget.

There being no one else wishing to speak, the public hearing was closed.

Chairman Fore said it is important for all citizens to realize the Board faces the difficult task of approving a budget that will meet the needs of our county while maintaining the financial stability of the county. He said countless hours are spent scrutinizing every line item in the budget, and the Board of

Supervisors and the county staff will account for every dollar that is collected and every dollar that is spent in the county. He thanked the citizens for their input in the county process and said their comments will be given serious consideration.

Chairman Fore said the county budget and the school budget will be considered for adoption at the meeting to be held on Tuesday, April 29, 2008 at 5:00 p.m.

On motion of Mr. McKay, seconded by Mr. Moore and adopted by the following vote:

Aye:	William G. Fore, Jr.	Nay: None
	Sally W. Gilfillan	
	Robert M. Jones	
	Charles W. McKay	
	James C. Moore	
	Howard F. Simpson	
	Lacy B. Ward	
	Mattie P. Wiley	

the meeting was recessed at 8:46 p.m., and will reconvene at 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, April 29, 2008.