

STAUNTON CITY SCHOOL BOARD
STAUNTON, VIRGINIA
Called Meeting Minutes
June 17, 2021

The Staunton City School Board convened in the Dr. Chiles Activity Room of the Irene Givens Administration Building at Montgomery Hall Park on Thursday, June 17, 2021, at 5:30 p.m., for a special called joint meeting with Staunton City Council and Staunton Economic Development Authority.

School Board members were in attendance as follows:

Kenneth Venable, Chair	Amy Wratchford, Vice-chair		
Robert Boyle	Natasha McCurdy	Christine Poulson	Ronald Ramsey
Dr. Garrett Smith, Superintendent/Deputy Clerk			
Brenda Lovekamp, Clerk			

The meeting for each public body was called to order.

Steve Rosenberg, City Manager, suggested a format for the meeting to begin with remarks from Dr. Smith regarding the School Board's pending proposal to lease building #126 at Staunton Crossing, followed by a question/answer and open dialogue period.

Dr. Smith, Superintendent, shared that everyone in the room is here because they care deeply for the City of Staunton, its citizens, students and employees. He thanked everyone for taking the time to participate in this unprecedented gathering. He stated that the school division strives to operate following three principals: being responsible stewards of tax paper money, promoting equity whenever possible, and looking for win-win solutions for the both the City and the school division. He shared some examples: using interest from the high school construction bond to refurbish the tennis courts at Montgomery Hall Park instead of replacing courts at the high school site that were torn down during construction; having school maintenance department staff plow City streets this past winter when the City's public works department had a staff shortage due to illness; providing transportation for the Queen City Mischief and Magic Festival a few years ago when the transportation plan fell through at the last minute; and gifting land to the City for the West End Fire Station. He assured that, regardless of how this particular situation works out, the school division would always strive to follow these operating principles.

Dr. Smith distributed a packet of information to all meeting participants, reviewed briefly the original request to have the property gifted to the School Board, the subsequent offer to purchase the property, and now, the idea of leasing the property – noting that the lease option would not be financially feasible unless it were at least a 15-year lease.

The members of the three bodies engaged in a discussion regarding:

- the Staunton Crossing property
 - the age and condition of building #126
 - the amount of work that would be required to make the building usable
 - the cost of the necessary repair work to the building
 - the condition of the freezer and refrigeration units contained within the building
 - the lack of an operational fuel station on this site
 - the current potential for developer interest
 - the location of the future entrances to Staunton Crossing when the roads are complete
 - the potential volume of additional traffic the consolidated operations facility could create
- the urgency the school division feels to address the location of the maintenance and transportation departments
 - the need to address current safety concerns surrounding the maintenance department's location in the basement of Shelburne Middle School
 - despite exhaust and air-handling systems in place, fumes and odors move upstairs into the classroom spaces
 - students and staff often have to evacuate
 - if student testing is taking place, no work can be done in the maintenance shop area
 - the school division is slated to receive a significant amount of funding through the federal ESSER3 funds
 - unprecedented for the school division to have access to this amount of funds for use to address space issues in our schools and to help prevent any future pandemic-related shutdowns
 - ESSER3 funds could be used to improve learning spaces by renovating and expanding classroom spaces and CTE offerings at Shelburne Middle School
 - ESSER3 funds must be obligated by September 2023 and the work completed 12 months later

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- agreement among the public bodies that addressing the relocation of these departments is long overdue and needs to happen quickly
- the possibility of the availability of other properties inside and outside of the City limits
 - the purchase expense of these properties, in addition to construction costs, is in excess of the funds the school division has readily available through ESSER3 funds
 - many of the available properties are larger than what the school division needs or are undeveloped land parcels
 - the suggestion to check on a specific noted property within the City that could meet the needs of the school division and is currently for sale
- the possibility of the City investing in a larger property that would have sufficient space to accommodate the needs of both the City departments and the school division
 - other City departments are also facing storage concerns
 - the school division continues to be willing to share space with other City departments
- the efficiency that a consolidated space would provide
 - delivery trucks to come to one location instead of traveling to all schools
 - potential to rent storage space to neighboring divisions also facing storage concerns, especially for cold and dry food
- concerns regarding moving employees out of the West End area
 - revitalization of the West End area is a concern for City Council
 - the employees of these school division departments contribute to the businesses on the West End (gas, convenience stores, food, etc.)
- the possibility and willingness of City Council to contribute financially to a resolution to these problems
 - unlikely that the City budget will have any funding available for the upcoming fiscal year
 - the City's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds could be a possibility
 - the City has not yet evaluated how those funds will be used to address various priorities
- the need to find a solution quickly

After the discussion, representatives from the EDA indicated that the lease option is not desirable as the 15-year term is too long for the EDA to commit to lease the property.

John Blair, City Attorney, reminded of the July 3 deadline on the demolition contract. The consensus of the group was not to remove building #126 from the demolition contract. William Vaughn, Director of Community Development & Economic Development, noted that the EDA would continue to work with the school division, Parks & Rec, and other departments to give time to remove any items currently stored in that facility.


Dr. Smith proposed a working group of the School Board and City Council to explore options and a timeline to address this need. Mayor Andrea Oakes suggested that Dr. Smith and Mr. Rosenberg collaborate on this working group.

The consensus of City Council members was to support allocating City financial resources to find a resolution to this problem.

Dr. Smith expressed appreciation to all for coming to the table together to talk through the problem and seek a solution.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.


CLERK / DEPUTY CLERK OF THE BOARD


CHAIR / VICE-CHAIR OF THE BOARD