

**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
CONTINUED SESSION
MAY 7, 2015
MINUTES**

Vice-Chairman Tate reconvened the meeting at 4:14 p.m. as recessed from the April 21, 2015 continuation meeting. Commissioner Beale, Commissioner Shields, the County Manager, Deputy Clerk and Finance Director were present, as were all five members of the Macon County Board of Education, several Macon County Schools staff members, news media and interested citizens.

Vice-Chairman Tate explained that Chairman Corbin was out of town and would not be in attendance, and also noted the absence of Commissioner Higdon. He stressed the importance of communication between the two elected bodies, and told the school board members that he was “proud to brag we have an excellent relationship with you all.” He added that while he was aware of the “financial pain” that the school board was going through, it was up to the commissioners to “balance of needs” of all those seeking county funding.

Prior to proceeding with the agenda items, Terry Bell with Macon County Schools informed both boards that he had obtained a quote for the required asbestos abatement at Union Academy. Out of the three quotes obtained, Mr. Bell said that Asheville Global Environmental LLC was the lowest at \$13,700, and with the air testing done by a third party at a cost of \$500, he asked both boards to consider approving the work at a total cost of \$14,200. Mr. Bell also noted that the project budget contained \$30,000 for this particular item. Macon County Board of Education Chairman Jim Breedlove asked for a motion from the school board members to approve the item as presented, and upon a motion by Tommy Cabe, seconded by Fred Goldsmith, the Board of Education voted unanimously to approve the work for the asbestos abatement. Then, upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the commissioners voted unanimously to accept the bid from Asheville Global Environmental LLC in an amount not to exceed \$14,200. A copy of the

estimate from the company is attached (Attachment 1) and is hereby made a part of these minutes.

Macon County Schools Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin presented a PowerPoint presentation that covered a number of topics, including some historical information on reductions made by the school system since 2011-12, the impact of small schools (Highlands, Nantahala, Summit (K-8), Mountain Discovery and Grandfather Academy), the benefits of contract employees, and the school board's requested appropriation of \$7,865,673 for Fiscal Year 2015-16, which represents an increase of \$527,343 over the current year figure. Dr. Baldwin noted that the total student enrollment in the five schools listed above is 483, and if you take that number and divide it among the 320 classrooms in the Franklin area schools, the class size would increase by only 1.5 students and no additional teachers would be required, resulting in a savings of \$2,173,500. He also explained that there are 29 teachers paid by Macon County, along with 50 other support personnel for a total of 79 "locally paid" positions.

During the discussion that followed, one of the main points focused on the request for \$279,000 to pay teacher assistants at the kindergarten and early elementary levels. Dr. Baldwin explained that funding of that \$279,000 would prevent layoffs, and he later went through a list of "positions potentially available for attrition" that, in total, could save the system \$681,800, which exceeds the \$564,027 budget deficit by \$117,773. He then reviewed options to reduce the \$279,000 allotment for teacher assistants, a \$72,000 reduction in driver education, and an \$85,000 offset for expenditures for teacher pay increases. These items were discussed at length, and a copy of this document is attached (Attachment 2) and is hereby made a part of these minutes.

Following Dr. Baldwin's presentation, Commissioner Beale pointed out that the proposed increase in the school's appropriation would be equal to a three-quarter-cent tax increase at the county level, and asked the school board members if they were recommending that the county take over the state's funding responsibilities. Afterward, the discussion turned to other specific items such as maintenance and the need for an assistant principal at Franklin High School. Vice-Chairman Tate told the school board members, "We hear you loud and clear," adding that county officials would need to have "some serious discussions" about funding levels.

The County Manager provided an update from the county's perspective, explaining that 29 percent of the county's overall budget goes to Macon County Schools, and with School Resource Officers (SROs) now at all 11 schools, that accounts for another half million dollars in expenditures. The new QZAB project for Union Academy and Highlands School will add approximately

\$200,000 in debt to the county each year for the next 15 years. Meanwhile, this is a property revaluation year for the county and the tax base is down 18 percent. While sales tax numbers are positive and the county has some debt rolling off, the County Manager noted there are some internal needs the county must meet, such as employee insurance, a new telephone system, data storage and getting the Parker Meadows Recreational Complex up and running. He pointed out that he would be presenting his recommended Fiscal Year 2015-16 budget to the county commissioners on May 21st.

Commissioner Shields asked if there was any advantage to the county and school system jointly buying computers, and both Mr. Bell and the county Finance Director agreed that it was best for both to remain separate.

With no other business, and upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to adjourn at 5:48 p.m.

Derek Roland
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

Kevin Corbin
Board Chairman