

MINUTES

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF HENDERSON

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
OCTOBER 20, 2005

The Henderson County Board of Commissioners met for a special called meeting at 6:30 p.m. in the Commissioners' Conference Room of the Henderson County Office Building.

Those present were: Chairman Bill Moyer, Vice-Chairman Charlie Messer, Commissioner Larry Young, Commissioner Shannon Baldwin, Commissioner Chuck McGrady, County Manager David E. Nicholson, Assistant County Manager Justin Hembree, County Attorney Russell Burrell, and Deputy Clerk to the Board Amy Brantley.

Also present were: Library Director Bill Snyder and Public Information Officer Chris S. Coulson.

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

Chairman Moyer called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance. He stated that this meeting was being held with respect to the Tuxedo School Property, and would provide the Board a chance to consider all the input and letters received, and to hear from Staff regarding the questions raised to date.

PRESENTATION OF STAFF REPORT

Justin Hembree provided the Board with a background of the Tuxedo library and park project. There had been a longstanding desire, both by the citizens and County, to develop a community park in the Tuxedo area. Likewise, there had been an interest in finding a new home for the Green River Branch Library. Those wishes were formally placed on the County's "to do" list through the current Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and Strategic Plan. The current CIP included a place setting of \$1 million for a library and park project in the Tuxedo community. The Strategic Plan called for the various planning phases of a park project on the Tuxedo School site, and the proposed demolition of the building to take place in the current fiscal year with bidding and construction of the recreation and library project to be completed in fiscal year 2006-2007.

One of the continuing issues in locating a park, and in turn a new library, in the tuxedo community was the availability of property in the area. The County's Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and Recreation Department had actively searched for appropriate properties for a number of years. Unfortunately, nothing in terms of property had materialized from those efforts.

In the past year however, The Henderson County Board of Education had declared the Tuxedo School and all associated property surplus. By law, the County had first opportunity to obtain the Tuxedo School property. Based on the inability to locate suitable property in the Tuxedo area, and action by the Board of Education to declare the Tuxedo School property surplus, basic plans to use the property for both a community park and new branch library were developed. Mr. Hembree clarified that the County did have right of first refusal, but had neither taken over ownership of the property, nor begun formal negotiations to try to purchase the property.

Mr. Hembree provided a more detailed description of the property. The property was formerly used as an elementary school campus. The total site was approximately 6.93 acres. It houses two buildings specifically designed for school use. The first of those buildings was the main building which was a two story masonry classroom building. The total area of the building was approximately 17,718 square feet. That main building had been constructed in two phases. The first phase was constructed in 1924, and the second phase was constructed in 1952. The second building was a two classroom building with a total area of 2,560 square feet.

Mr. Hembree stated that public water and sewer services were not available at the site. However, there were on site well and septic systems that had proven adequate to serve the site in its use as a small elementary school over the years. The site might support some sort of light institutional or commercial use. However it would likely not support a more intensive industrial/commercial or high density residential use.

DATE APPROVED: _____

As discussions about the development of a community park and new library have proceeded, conversations have centered on the possible demolition of the Tuxedo School building. Some members of the community feel the school building should not be demolished, but put to use. Some citizens feel the building should be demolished to make room for a community park and allow for a new branch library. Others have indicated that they would prefer a library and park facility placed on the property without demolishing the building. On September 20, 2005, a community meeting was held in Tuxedo to seek comment as to the future of the Tuxedo School building. The Board of Commissioners had scheduled this meeting to consider the issue.

Mr. Hembree noted that the staff report outlined two possible options. He stated though, that didn't mean there were only two options. He felt there were numerous options for the project in terms of restoration, and parks and recreation. However, staff had worked from the two primary options discussed at the community meeting.

Option 1 - Library and Park Facility (Demolition of Building)

One project option was the development of a library and park facility on the Tuxedo School site with demolition of the existing building. This was the option that most discussion and planning at the staff level had centered upon. This option included the renovation and expansion of the existing two room auxiliary building for use as a library. Current plans called for a 4,000 square foot building when renovation and expansion were complete. Passive recreation facilities were planned on other areas of property included in the footprint of the building. These recreation facilities could include a one-half mile paved walking trail, playground equipment, paved and lighted basketball courts, a multi-purpose activity field, three picnic shelters, and individual picnic tables. A 40 space parking lot was also being considered. The following preliminary budget estimate had been developed for this option:

<i>Preliminary Budget Estimate, Option 1</i>	
Item	Estimated Cost
Building Demolition	\$100,000
Library Design and Construction	\$600,000
40 Space Parking Lot	\$35,000
Recreation Facilities	
½ Mile Paved Walking Trail	\$25,000
Playground Equipment	\$60,000
Paved & Lighted Basketball Courts	\$45,000
Multi-Purpose Activity Field	\$30,000
3 Picnic Shelters	\$75,000
9 Picnic Tables	\$9,000
Contingency	\$21,000
Total Estimate	\$1,000,000

*Based on 4,000 square feet at \$150 per square foot.

Option 2 - Preservation of Building (No Demolition of Building)

The preservation of the Tuxedo School building and site was another option. Numerous possibilities existed with this option. However, it was noted that most, if not all, of the factors relating to preservation of the building center around full participation from the private sector. On October 4, staff met with Mr. Ted Alexander of Preservation North Carolina. Mr. Alexander was involved with the East Flat Rock School preservation project. Two options that were discussed with Mr. Alexander were:

- The Board of Education may deed the Tuxedo School property to Preservation North Carolina. In turn, Preservation North Carolina would market the property to private developers that would use and preserve the property for a private purpose.
- The Board of Education may deed the Tuxedo School property to Preservation North Carolina with easements or covenants that require a portion of the property to be used for public purposes (cultural and recreational). In turn, Preservation North Carolina would market the

property to private developers that would use the remainder of the property for a private purpose.

Based on an analysis by recreation staff and a local design professional, it had been determined that the following recreation facilities could be placed on the property surrounding the Tuxedo School building:

- A one-quarter mile walking trail.
- Two picnic sheds.
- Playground equipment.
- Paved and lighted basketball court.

Mr. Hembree stated that there were several areas in which Staff required direction from the Board. The Board would need to determine whether they wished to direct Staff to begin the process of purchasing the property from the Board of Education, and if so, what would the public need be listed as for the property. He felt that question was central in determining the future of the project.

Mr. Hembree also stated that a lot of questions had been raised about the project in the past weeks. Some of those related to how much funding was set aside for the project. He stated that there was debt service included in the CIP to allow for the borrowing of \$1 million. That money was not tied to any particular piece of property. He stated again that the Henderson County Board of Education currently owned the property. The conceptual plans being considered were extremely preliminary, but included most amenities found in community parks. If the project proceeds, the County would seek input from the community about the design, and what amenities they would need and want.

The final question was how much it would cost to rehabilitate the main building. The figure was derived from other projects done locally through the school system. Based on those projects, the cost was estimated at \$1.4 million, which was the equivalent of \$79 per square foot. Mr. Hembree asked the Board to keep in mind that number only included the building itself: new plumbing, mechanical work, replacement of the windows, new handicap ramps, exits, new elevator, electrical and lighting, new roofing, new floors and ceilings, painting, upgrades to stairwells, site work and the parking area. It did not include any costs associated with wastewater, water supply, hazardous material removal, the purchase price of the building, or any improvements. It also did not include the purchase price of the building.

Commissioner Baldwin requested that Mr. Hembree provide the Board a spreadsheet on Option 2, such as was provided for Option 1.

LIBRARY STAFF AND BOARD COMMENTS

Library Director Bill Snyder addressed the Board. He stated that there were three issues from the standpoint of the library that had to be addressed.

1. Was there a need to do the project? Considering the history of the Green River library he felt there was indeed a need. The library had been in a 1,000 square foot building for 15 years. It had grown considerably in those 15 years, averaging 4.1 items per capita. The overall per capita average for the County was close to nine. However, the state average was about 6 items per capita. He pointed out that the County does not own the building where the library is located, and given the site limitations it would be difficult to expand adequately.
2. Was the Tuxedo School site suitable for a library? Mr. Snyder felt it was a desirable location, explaining that it was centrally located on a major road, was well know to the community, easily assessable, and very little site preparation would be necessary.
3. The big question was, if the property were acquired, what would the County do with the main building? Mr. Snyder explained some of the needs in a library. The main building is six times larger than what would be needed. Libraries typically have large open spaces. The existing structure has many walls, but not much open space. He felt that the existing structure would not be suitable. If the site were used, he recommended using only the auxiliary building.

Mr. Snyder answered several questions from the Board. He stated that he had been a library director for 32 years, and had been involved in nine building projects. He and an architect from Bill O’Cain’s office had visited the building about six years previous. Though no formal study had been conducted, it had been their consensus that the building would not work well. The architect was paid, but was paid by the Friends of the Library rather than the County.

RECREATION STAFF AND BOARD COMMENTS

Terry Maybin addressed the Board on behalf of the Recreation Advisory Board. She stated that she had been on the Board for the past 12 years. In those years, the community had been waiting their turn for a park, while looking for land. Approximately eight years ago, she and the previous Recreation Board Chairman had driven every street in Tuxedo looking for available land for a park. They had been waiting for something to open up ever since. She stated that she would appreciate the Board’s consideration for the Tuxedo School property, so they could finally proceed with a park for the area.

Ms. Maybin answered several questions from the Board. She stated that the Recreation Advisory Board had not taken an official stance on whether the main building should remain, but the consensus of the Recreation Board was that if the County did not proceed with this property, the opportunity for a park would be lost. If the main building remained however, they did not feel there would be a multipurpose field for any type of recreation. There was discussion about the population in Tuxedo versus East Flat Rock, and how much use the East Flat Rock Park was experiencing.

PRESENTATION OF STAFF REPORT - continued

Mr. Hembree presented the following preliminary budget estimate for Option 2, which would preserve the building:

<i>Preliminary Budget Estimate, Option 2</i>	
Item	Estimated Cost
Library Design and Construction	\$600,000
40 Space Parking Lot	\$35,000
Recreation Facilities	
¼ Mile Paved Walking Trail	\$12,500
2 Picnic Shelters	\$50,000
Playground Equipment	\$60,000
Paved & Lighted Basketball Courts	\$45,000
Contingency	\$10,500
Total Estimate	\$813,000

Commissioner McGrady stated that the assumption was the renovation of the accessory buildings. Not included in the estimate was the cost for renovation of the main building, or what the public purpose of the main school building would be. The Option 2 estimate simply backs out the demolition costs and other incidental differences in the recreational facilities. Mr. Hembree answered some questions from the Board about the differences in the total estimates.

Commissioner Young expressed concern about the estimated cost for demolition of the main building. He felt \$100,000 was too low, given that the demolition of the old Carolina Apparel Building was \$175,000 and the jail demolition was about \$180,000. He was also concerned that no estimate had been given for site grading and preparation, which he estimated at approximately \$500,000. Finally, the cost for the property had not been included, which was approximately \$418,000. He stated that the Board needed to decide whether the County was going to buy the property, build a library and park, and give the citizens the most that could be given on the site, or look for another site. He felt that decision should be made before doing any addition architectural or engineering work.

BOARD DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION

Commissioner Young stated that in listening to the information provided, he was hearing that the property was not sufficient to meet the needs of the community. He felt trying to buy the property and renovate it was off base as far as cost was concerned. He was of the opinion that the Board should look for other property, and provide the community more for the dollar.

Commissioner McGrady stated that he had heard something different during the presentations - that with regards to a library, Staff would make do with the building if necessary, though it certainly wouldn't be their recommendation, and that with regards to a park, after years of searching for property, this was about it. Commissioner McGrady stated that he lived in the area, and was unaware of any property available. He believed there were two choices available: the Board should either make the decision to purchase the property and demolish the building at an expensive cost, or instruct the Recreation Advisory Board and Library Board to continue their search for property.

Chairman Moyer stated that there was only one option in his opinion. The Tuxedo community had been promised a park and library year after year, and to pass over this site would put that promise on hold yet again. He believed the site was good, from the standpoint of it's location in the community and the fact that it used to be the heart of the community. With a vibrant park and library, he believed it could again become the heart of the community. Rather than try to fit too much on the property, he was of the opinion that the main building should be torn down, and the Board should move aggressively to try to get the library and park open for the citizens of Tuxedo.

Commissioner Messer stated that he had been on the Recreation Advisory Board for five years, and that the community deserved a park and library. If there were additional property available in that area, he did not know where it was. He did feel that the Board needed some additional figures on demolition and site grading. He agreed that the Board should pursue the site, and should tear down the school to provide as much recreational space as possible.

Commissioner Baldwin stated that he felt the previous two meetings had been more sales jobs than exploring the available options. He stated that he was not opposed to either option, but did have an affinity for historical structures and would prefer to find a way to preserve the school if possible. He expressed disappointment in the process used stating that the community and the Board deserved the chance to hear all the information and cost estimates for both options rather than just Option A.

Commissioner Young stated that he was in favor of giving the citizens in the Tuxedo area a library and a park. He did not feel though, that the site could support what the citizens deserved, even if the main building were torn down. He had trouble believing that property could not be found that would better suit the community's needs. If the Board did opt to proceed with the school site however, he would be in favor of demolishing the building.

Commissioner McGrady stated that he shared some of the reservations already expressed, and had some doubts about the demolition costs coming in as projected. However, his preference was to build the park and library on the site, which would mean the old school building would need to be demolished. He suggested directing staff to develop really strong, detailed, plans and costs.

Following additional discussion by the Board, *Chairman Moyer made the motion to indicate that the Board would like to receive more detailed numbers, would like to try to make the site work with respect to the library and the park, would like to receive more detailed numbers with respect to the cost for demolition of the school building and site grading, more detailed figures for the cost of the park, look at reconfiguration of the property moving the multipurpose field to the middle of the property, and see the Option B numbers placing the library in the main building.* There followed some additional discussion about Option B. Chairman Moyer stated that the new Option B would be to retain the main building, the library would be placed in that main building, the auxiliary classroom building would be demolished, and the multipurpose field would be moved to the middle of the property. A vote was then taken on the motion. *All voted in favor and the motion carried.*

Commissioner McGrady questioned what the timeline would be to hear the requested figures. Because it was a school building, the Board of Education was maintaining it, and would soon need to winterize it at some cost. Chairman Moyer stated that he would let Board of Education Chairman Ervin Bazzle know that the Board was moving forward, would like to make the site work, but wished to see more detailed numbers. He stated the Board would shoot for a month, and hoped Staff would be able to get those figures in the time span.

Adjourn

Commissioner McGrady made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m. All voted in favor and the motion carried.

Attest:

Amy R. Brantley, Deputy Clerk to the Board

William L. Moyer, Chairman

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