

Virginia: At a Special meeting of the Essex County Board of Supervisors: School Superintendent and Social Services Budget Requests held on Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. at the School Board Meeting Room, 109 S. Cross St., Tappahannock, Virginia:

Board of Supervisors Present: Robert Akers, Jr., Chairman
 Ronnie G. Gill, Vice Chairman
 John C. Magruder, Supervisor
 Edwin E. Smith, Jr., Supervisor
 Sidney N. Johnson, Supervisor

County Administration Present: None

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Akers called the Special meeting of the Board of Supervisors Budget Session of March 15, 2022 to order.

ROLL CALL

Chairman Akers called out the roll for the Board of Supervisors; a quorum was met.

AGENDA

Chairman Akers wished to add the Hoskins Creek Resolution that was tabled at the last Board of Supervisors' meeting. The Board agreed.

SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT AND SOCIAL SERVICES BUDGET REQUESTS

Chairman Akers stated that it is the Board's duty to listen to the presentations and determine what the County can afford to spend.

School Superintendent – Dr. Thomas

Dr. Thomas addressed the Board of Supervisors and introduced Mrs. Franklin, Director of Finance for the Schools, and Mr. Whitaker, the School Board Chairman. He said since the State General Assembly has not decided on their budget, he does not have definitive budget numbers for the Board. Enrollment figures drive the budget. Student achievement is the #1 goal as well as becoming fully accredited. Since March 2020, accreditation has been waived due to COVID. In 2019 the high school was conditionally accredited with deficiencies in mathematics and English. Dr. Thomas reported that Essex High School has achieved a graduation rate of 95% or better in the last two years. The high school scored 61.3% in math and that figure must be 70% to become fully accredited. The emphasis now is on each classroom to achieve accreditation. He wants 100% of highly qualified staff. He wants to retain that staff but turnover is too high. The school has lost 10-12 teachers.

FY23 Expected expenditures. Dr. Thomas said surrounding jurisdictions are starting at a 5% increase for teachers' salaries. Essex had to change the school bus drivers' scale to retain them. There is a 3% increase in salary in the budget for principals and AP's. Current principal salaries are \$5,000 less than the market. The total salary increase in the budget is \$745,000. Current student enrollment is 1,284 and 70 more are virtual children. Since the COVID protocols were dropped in the schools, more parents are

requesting that their children attend school virtually, however, that program was closed some months ago for the school year. This year's budget is \$500,000 higher than last year's budget.

Grant Covered Expenses: Dr. Thomas went over the items covered by the CARE's money.

Chairman Akers said the local share this year is \$5.12 million. He asked Dr. Thomas what it was last year. Dr. Thomas responded that the local share last year was \$4 million. Chairman Akers asked Dr. Thomas to explain the Risk Program \$1.2 million local match. Dr. Thomas replied that it was hard to say and 80% of the budget is staffing. Supervisor Magruder asked Dr. Thomas how many years of service is the breaking point for teachers. Dr. Thomas said normally it is 18-20 years of service, however, the County is losing teachers at the 7-10 year range. The teacher work force climate is very competitive. The State may have to start relaxing credential requirements. Virginia has been in the top five educational States in the country. Vice Chairman Gill asked Dr. Thomas if he is offering sign on bonuses. Dr. Thomas answered that he is offering sign on bonuses to teachers as well as retention bonuses and finders fees.

Supervisor Magruder asked Dr. Thomas to e-mail his presentation to the Deputy Clerk for distribution to the Board. He also asked Dr. Thomas if he is requesting \$25,600 in a local match for the pre-school initiative. Dr. Thomas answered in the affirmative. Chairman Akers asked Dr. Thomas how much of the \$500,000 increase requested is for capital expenditures and to explain the capital expenditure plan. Vice Chairman Gill asked if the \$1.4 million in grant money for construction could be used for anything. Dr. Thomas answered that it could.

Chairman Akers suggested that the Board of Supervisors send any further questions they have regarding the school budget to the Director of Finance ahead of the next Board meeting on March 23, 2022.

Social Services – Candace Mickelborough

Ms. Mickelborough, Director of Social Services commenced her presentation with the DSS Budget. She stated that DSS, Department of Social Services, has 24 full time positions; one Director, three Administrative, nine Services staff, and ten Benefits staff. However, at this time the department has six vacancies. She is requesting \$2,560,500 for FY23 which represents an increase of \$239,624 from last year. The total local match is \$672,387 with an \$80,700 increase. The local match percentage is about 26.49%. Ms. Mickelborough hopes the cost will decrease in the future. She has budgeted a 3% increase in salaries totaling \$31,800 in the local match and a \$21,000 increase in legal fees as she predicts court involved cases will go up since COVID is over. She has budgeted an increase of \$4,000 for training and \$3,500 for furniture replacement. She will need some computer equipment to hold meetings virtually as the majority of the staff is not vaccinated.

Ms. Mickelborough reported that the base budget was exhausted in January of 2022 and the department is pulling Federal funds through the pass through program which has a high local match rate of 66%. Ms. Mickelborough shared the following statistics with the Board: the poverty rate in Essex County is 12% for all age groups and 20% for children; unemployment is higher than the State average; 4,210 people of the 10,580 population receives some type of social service benefits; and 200 children were served last year in Essex.

Supervisor Magruder asked that placeholders for money be removed from the budget. Chairman Akers stated that the higher burn rate of State funds needs to be investigated. Ms. Mickelborough said the vehicles used in Social Services are reimbursed by the State. Vice Chairman Gill asked if the monies

appropriated last week by the Board of Supervisors was for a different program and Ms. Mickelborough answered in the affirmative that it was for the CHINS program which is part of CSA – Childs Services Act.

Ms. Mickelborough stated that she is requesting \$2 million for the CSA program for the FY23 fiscal year, of which 38% or \$760,000 is the local match. She reported that the program just received four new cases and there may be additional truancy cases because schools have restarted in person learning. Vice Chairman Gill stated that he is having a hard time understanding why the FY23 budget request is so much higher than previous years. Ms. Mickelborough answered that last year the budget request was \$1.9 million.

HOSKINS CREEK RECREATION PROJECT RESOLUTION

Chairman Akers suggested that if the Board votes in favor of the Resolution, it should be contingent upon an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the Town of Tappahannock. Supervisor Magruder added that the MOU needs to state that it indemnifies Essex County from any costs associated with the project. Chairman Akers will direct the County Administrator to draft the MOU and Resolution in time for the Board's next meeting on March 23, 2022.

MISCELLANEOUS

Supervisor Magruder stated that the Virginia General Assembly is working on an additional 1% tax on meals with proceeds going toward school infrastructure needs.

Chairman Akers said the School Board is looking at establishing a two school system.

Supervisor Magruder said he is not in favor of a percentage pay increase as it ratchets up salaries. He prefers a set amount of money instead.

ADJOURN

Chairman Akers asked for a motion to adjourn the Board of Supervisors Budget Work Session and Supervisor Magruder so moved. Vice Chairman Gill seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Chairman

Clerk of the Board