



**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
JANUARY 23, 2024  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

Chairman Shields called the meeting to order at 11:49 a.m. Board Members Paul Higdon, Josh Young, and Danny Antoine, County Manager Derek Roland, Deputy Clerk Tammy Keezer, Finance Director Lori Carpenter, County Attorney Eric Ridenour, members of the Macon County Board of Education, Senator Kevin Corbin, Representative Karl Gillespie, were present, as were a number of state officials, media, and citizens. Commissioner Shearl was excused.

Senator Corbin began by explaining that he had spoken with both the Macon County Board of Education and the Macon County Board of Commissioners regarding the grant application for a new Franklin High School (FHS) that was submitted to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and had wanted to arrange a meeting to introduce both boards to the decision-makers with DPI agreeing to come to Franklin. He said the funding model for the grant funding requires the county to pay for brick-and-mortar and the state funding to pay for positions. Senator Corbin indicated that the Legislature has allocated 400 million dollars per year to DPI to make decisions on where the funding goes. Representative Gillespie said it is not his or Senator Corbin's job to make local decisions, but it is their job to ensure they bring available funding back to our district and thanked Senator Corbin for putting the meeting together. Senator Corbin introduced State Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt and indicated that she had toured Franklin High School with him this morning and had seen firsthand some of the challenges of the current facilities.

Superintendent Truitt said she had toured Nantahala School in 2021, the west has had a special place in her heart and said Macon County should know that the far west is being represented well in Raleigh with Senator Corbin and Representative Gillespie fighting very hard every session for resources to come to the far west.

Senator Corbin requested that three groups who were in attendance be allowed to address the boards.

Franklin Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors President Matt Corbin introduced board members John Hamlin and Bryson Burt, as well as Executive Director Linda Harbuck, and read a letter of support stating how a new high school would benefit the students and community of Macon County.

Town of Franklin Mayor Jack Horton made remarks about how the county has long supported a new high school and applauded all those who are working together to make this project work. He said each Town of Franklin board member is supportive of this project and will be adopting a resolution in full support of a new high school during their upcoming budget retreat.



Town of Highlands Mayor Patrick Taylor said he and his board members were here because they represent the best interest of students. He introduced board members Jeff Weller, Amy Patterson, and Eric Pierson and said the board fully endorses this project.

Emily Kite, Senior Project Manager with LS3P gave an overview of the project planning process and the recommendation for a new high school. She explained that LS3P is currently in the design phase and shared a fly-through video presentation of the proposed design. Ms. Kite indicated that the plan is for a 1,400-student capacity with the consolidation of the alternative high school program, 30 classrooms dedicated to Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming, and a huge focus on athletic facilities. Ms. Kite shared that the building will have everything under one roof with a secure front entrance including an outdoor courtyard so students can be outside during the day in a safe environment. She indicated that LS3P is looking at the April to July timeframe to start construction just in time for the expected grant award announcements.

Superintendent Truitt asked Superintendent Josh Lynch and CTE Director Colleen Strickland about the CTE programming being planned. Superintendent Lynch said that offerings and pathways have been bolstered over the past couple of years. Ms. Strickland said the program has grown from offering eight pathways to now offering 20 pathways including aviation, basic EMT, computer science, robotics, welding, automotive, carpentry, etc. Superintendent Truitt said the interest in CTE on the application caught her attention and she believes rural counties usually do a better job in vocational education and training. She mentioned knowledge that Franklin High School is not ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant right now and the facilities have multiple points of entrance posing safety concerns. Superintendent Truitt then announced a grant award of \$62,000,000 to Macon County for a new Franklin High School.

Senator Corbin thanked Superintendent Truitt for coming to Macon County to present the award. Macon County Board of Commissioners Chairman Gary Shields and Macon County Board of Education Board Chairman Jim Breedlove made comments to thank Superintendent Truitt, Senator Corbin, and Representative Gillespie, as well as those in attendance. Superintendent Lynch shared that he is thankful for this award. Senator Corbin closed out the discussion indicating that this is the largest award that anyone has received and this is the first award of this round of awards from DPI.

With no other business, at 12:22 p.m., upon a motion from Commissioner Young, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, the board voted unanimously to adjourn.

  
Derek Roland  
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

  
Gary Shields  
Board Chair