

Meeting Minutes
March 4, 2023

MINUTES OF MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

The Board of Commissioners of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, met in Special Session at the Mecklenburg County Government Center 832 E. Fourth St, Charlotte, NC 28202 at 8:00 AM on March 4th, 2023.

ATTENDANCE

Present: Chair George Dunlap and Commissioners
Leigh Altman, Patricia “Pat” Cotham, Arthur Griffin,
Mark Jerrell, Vilma D. Leake, Laura J Meier, Elaine Powell,
and Susan Rodriguez-McDowell
County Manager Dena R. Diorio
County Attorney Tyrone C. Wade
Clerk to the Board Kristine M. Smith
Deputy Clerk to the Board Arlissa Eason

Absent: Commissioner Laura J. Meier

Also in Attendance: CMS Board of Education: Chair Elyse Dashew, Vice Chair Stephanie Sneed, Superintendent Dr. Crystal Hill, and Board members Jennifer De La Jara, Lenora Shipp, Thelma Byers-Bailey, Melissa Easley, Dee Rankin, Lisa Cline, Summer Nunn

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Dunlap.

Chair Dunlap discussed the rules of engagement, which was followed by introductions, and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag; after which the following matters were addressed.

Chair Dunlap and Board of Education Chair Dashew gave opening remarks.

23-0155 **Joint Meeting Between Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners
and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education**

Presentation: **The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Capital Improvement plan**

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Dr. Crystal Hill, Interim School Superintendent, began the presentation.

Dr. Crystal L. Hill expressed gratitude to Chair Dashew and addressed the community, detailing the extensive community engagement over the past 10 months. During these meetings with the public, there has been widespread support for capital investment to ensure healthier, safer schools and alleviate overcrowding. The assessment conducted by the school system indicates a 10-year need for facilities with a total of 125 projects, estimating an unescalated cost of approximately \$5.25 billion. This initial list of 40 projects was subsequently narrowed down to an estimated \$2.8 billion unescalated. The Board of Education, on Tuesday, adopted Dr. Hill's recommendation for 30 projects, with an escalated cost estimated at \$2.99 billion. It is emphasized that this list of 30 projects does not cover all the facility needs for Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, acknowledging the substantial overall need. Dr. Hill highlights that the plan provides an opportunity to increase capacity and significantly enhance conditions in some of the oldest schools. The importance of the school system in the greater Mecklenburg County ecosystem is recognized by both the school administration and the community. There's an understanding that capital funding is crucial not only for the schools but for the entire county. Acknowledging and appreciating the ongoing collaboration and support from the community, including Mecklenburg County government, Dr. Hill specifically mentions the collaborative efforts of County Manager Dena R. Diorio and her staff. The positive outcomes of this collaboration are illustrated by Charlotte being one of only 22 cities in the country awarded a gold medal by the City Health Initiative for High-Quality Accessible Pre-K. Dr. Hill concludes by expressing optimism about the future, stating that the current collaboration is just a glimpse of what is to come in building a better tomorrow for Mecklenburg County. She then transitions to Mr. Brian Schultz, the Chief Operations Officer, to continue the presentation.

Mr. Brian Schultz, Chief Operating Officer, began his section of the presentation.

Mr. Brian Schultz expressed gratitude and pleasure in being present to update commissioners, board members, and colleagues on the progress of the 2017 bond for Charlotte Mecklenburg schools. He emphasized the substantial progress made, aligning with the spending plan and project outlines. The presentation covers updates on the 2017 bond progress, including a comprehensive review of facilities, programs, and boundaries, along with a focus on community engagement. Mr. Schultz mentions the extensive community engagement with nearly 100 in-person and virtual sessions over the past six months. The comprehensive improvement plan, based on community input, was recently approved by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education. He introduced a timeline that began in December, highlighting key milestones such as the initial presentation of the 125 projects in May 2022 and the ongoing community engagement from August to early February. The Board of Education's recent approval sets the stage for the discussion of the Comprehensive Improvement Plan. A screenshot of the CMS bond construction website was shared, emphasizing transparency in delivering on the 2017 bond commitments. The website provides details on timelines, progress, and dollar spends. Mr. Schultz stressed the importance of collaboration among government entities to deliver world-

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class facilities while being accountable to both the audience and taxpayers of Mecklenburg County. The website is presented as a valuable resource, offering real-time information similar to on-site cameras showing construction progress. Mr. Schultz concludes by handing over to Mr. Dennis LaCaria to delve into specific details, exemplified by a current project on the west side of Charlotte.

Mr. Dennis LaCaria began his section of the presentation.

Mr. Dennis LaCaria, in his section of the presentation, discussed the progress and details of CMS (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools) bond construction projects. The dashboard landing page on the CMS bond construction website provides an overview of all projects. Mr. LaCaria emphasizes the success of the MWSBE (Minority and Women Small Business Enterprises) program, contributing \$370 million to such businesses. The workforce development requirement in the RFQ (Request for Qualifications) has created 70 permanent and 30 temporary jobs; adding that investment was not just in schools and students but also in the workforce. The construction progress includes 16 completed projects, 10 under construction, and 3 in the design phase. LaCaria mentions the Bruns Avenue Elementary School, a joint-use project with the Parks and Recreation Department, incorporating sustainability with solar domestic hot water. This project was being completed in conjunction with the Wallace Pruitt Recreation Center. Bruns Elementary will open August 2024. LaCaria emphasized that in the new Capital Improvement Plan, CMS real estate is being used before acquiring new real estate; building on current sites to allow onsite replacement of older facilities. The timeline for project completion extends to 2025 due to logistical considerations. Mr. LaCaria highlights the importance of starting with buildings in the capital planning process. Assumptions, methodologies, and standards guide their planning. Assumptions consider factors like COVID's ongoing impact, schedule formats, and Board of Education investments. Methodologies involve educational and construction specifications, and standards comply with building regulations. The rising construction costs, illustrated by a comparison of school costs in 2010 and current costs, emphasize the need for substantial capital investments. CMS internally develops execution plans for each school site, considering onsite replacements and addressing safety and security concerns. The capital planning process involves combining all needs comprehensively and identifying problem statements. The current focus is on classrooms and teaching environments. For instance, addressing classrooms without windows having fan coil units to improve air quality and how it impacts the learning environment. With a long-range facilities master plan and interim decisions from the Board of Education, CMS aims to manage the 125 projects in a 10-year plan, estimated at \$5.25 billion. Decision-making involves adjusting plans based on building use, program standing, and community engagement. LaCaria concludes, passing the baton to Ms. Nicole Portee to discuss community engagement in the process.

Nicole Portee provided an overview of the community engagement process. In Phase 1, conducted in October and November, the community engagement covered 11 topics, including capital investment, capturing market share, and boundary development. The engagement saw strong participation with 750+ attendees, seven virtual sessions, 50 in-person sessions, 45 additional requested meetings, and over 3,000 survey responses.

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Phase 1 results indicated support for capital investment in schools and consensus on a regional athletic model. There was also backing for Charlotte-Mecklenburg priorities and the student assignment process, despite recognizing associated challenges. Moving to Phase 2, the top 40 projects, totaling \$2.885 billion at an unescalated cost, were presented to the community. The engagement process for Phase 2 included meetings across the county, resulting in 500+ attendees, four virtual sessions, 33 in-person sessions, one Spanish session with significant attendance, and 27 requested meetings. The project information was also accessed by 2,100 individuals through the website. During Phase 2, there continued to be widespread support for capital investment, with a desire for community advocacy and appreciation for engaging the community in these projects. Additionally, there was notable support for creating healthier and safer school environments. Common questions from the community included inquiries about how projects were identified, the availability of funding for proposed projects, and understanding the distinctions between on-site and off-site replacements. Ms. Portee concludes her overview, passing the discussion back to Mr. Dennis LaCaria.

Dennis LaCaria presented the superintendent's recommendation, a proposal that received approval from the Board of Education on February 28th. The revised list now comprises 30 projects, down from the initial 40, with a significant financial commitment of almost \$3 billion (\$2.997 billion) allocated for the five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Mr. LaCaria provided a comprehensive overview, outlining the schools impacted by these projects and considering potential magnet program implications. Additionally, he broke down the distribution of these initiatives by both Board of Education District and Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioner District. The presentation delved into the intricacies of various replacement strategies. On-site replacements, exemplified by the Bruns and Beverly Woods projects, involve constructing a new school on the existing site, relocating staff and students, and ensuring the new facility is operational. Off-site replacements, as illustrated in the Allenbrook project, occur when suitable nearby real estate is available, allowing for the construction of a new school while retaining students in the current building until the new one is ready. The concept of balance of campus replacements is explained, emphasizing leveraging previous investments to replace remaining campus facilities.

Numerous specific projects are highlighted, each with unique considerations:

Specific projects mentioned include:

Albemarle Road Middle School: On-site replacement for a 54-classroom baseline facility.

Allenbrook Off-site Replacement: Utilizing land across Freedom Drive with plans for Park and Rec to acquire the current Allenbrook site.

Berryhill School: Replacement using land bought by Park and Rec across the street to connect to new water and sewer infrastructure.

Beverly Woods Onsite Replacement: Simultaneous replacement with Bruns, providing an

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opportunity for investment in Montessori programs.

Chantilly Montessori/Cotswold/Billingsville: *On-site replacement of Cotswold elementary school, collapsing paired school into Billingsville for project duration; renovate Billingsville for relocated Montessori PK-6 program; demolish Chantilly.*

Cochran: *On-site replacement with a 54-classroom school baseline facility; relocate 9-12 iMeck program to Garinger high school.*

Cornelius: *On-site replacement with 45 classroom baseline facility.*

Coolwood: *On-site replacement with a focus on repurposing the park in collaboration with Park & Rec.*

E.E. Waddell: *Program-specific addition to support existing programs.*

East Mecklenburg: *Balance of campus replacement, including finalizing work on new classrooms and replacing athletics facilities.*

Garinger: *A phased approach to work around historic register constraints.*

Harding University: *Replacement of the remaining campus, including scraping the stadium for synthetic turf, an eight-lane track, field houses, restrooms, and ticket booths.*

Huntersville: *On-site replacement, offering opportunities for program adjustments or boundary shifts.*

John Taylor Williams: *Completion of work to support the alternative education program.*

Marie G. Davis: *Convert facility to 7-12 Montessori to replace use at J.T. Williams and expand program.*

Matthews Elementary School: *Replacement of the existing building.*

3 New Middle Schools: *Middle School #1 baseline 54 classroom facility to relieve Community House Middle School, Jay M. Robinson Middle School, and Rea Farms Steam K-8. Middle School #2 baseline 54 classroom facility at Stumptown Road to relieve Bailey Road, Davidson K-8, and JM Alexander. Middle School #3 baseline 54 classroom facility on HWY 160 to relieve Southwest and Kennedy Middle Schools. Each addressing capacity issues and allowing adjustments to grade spans.*

Second Ward Medical & Technical High School: *Relocation of the health sciences Academy from Hawthorne, expanding offerings and re-establishing a high school on the Second Ward site.*

North Mecklenburg High School: *Balance of campus replacement.*

Northwest First Ward and University Park: *Creating a three-school School of the Arts with a 9-12 high school; First Ward a 6-12 magnet middle school for the arts, and University Park is replaced with an on-site replacement for the performing arts K-5 elementary magnet.*

Park Road Montessori: *Potential relocation to the Sedgefield elementary school site after replacing Park Road with a new neighborhood school.*

South Charlotte Middle School: *On-site replacement, addressing the lack of previous capital investment.*

South Mecklenburg High School: *Final phases of work, to include onsite replacement of balance of campus +/- 100 classroom baseline, comprehensive athletics package.*

Steel Creek Elementary School: *On-site replacement, prioritizing work in poor condition.*

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Villa Heights: *Off-site replacement at Hawthorne, facilitating demolition and discussions with Park and Rec.*

West Regional Athletic Complex: *A facility to support high schools' athletics packages and provide additional amenities for various sports competitions.*

Wilson's STEM Academy: *On-site replacement with a new baseline facility.*

The overall emphasis is on the necessity of these projects, carefully considering factors such as capacity, condition, and programmatic requirements. The recommendations are strategically crafted to address immediate challenges, enhance educational environments, and prepare for future needs. Following the comprehensive overview, the presentation invites questions and discussions from the audience.

Comments

Ms. Summer Nunn expressed gratitude for the presentation and underscored the significance of the proposed projects, particularly as a parent of two elementary school children. She highlights the demographic landscape of Mecklenburg County, emphasizing that the largest groups are parents of elementary school kids or individuals evaluating where to send their children to elementary school. Ms. Nunn raised concerns about middle school development, citing overcrowding and facilities as common reasons for parents leaving CMS. She seeks clarity on how the proposed plan addresses middle school capacity issues and its potential impact on overcrowding. In response, Mr. Dennis LaCaria provided a detailed explanation, stating that the three new middle schools alone would add 54 classrooms each, translating to approximately 1,400 new seats per middle school. This expansion is expected to significantly contribute to addressing the capacity challenges currently faced by middle schools. Furthermore, Mr. LaCaria pointed out that the replacement of Wilson with a larger 54-classroom school also contributes to increased middle school capacity. He emphasized the importance of not only adding new middle schools but also replacing outdated facilities to create additional capacity. This strategic approach is crucial in reducing the reliance on portables, which are both expensive to operate and logistically challenging. Shifting the focus to elementary schools, Mr. LaCaria mentions the Allen Brook project, which more than doubled the size of the school and added around 24 classrooms. This expansion, along with other elementary projects, plays a key role in alleviating overcrowding. By bringing brick-and-mortar classrooms online, the plan aims to reduce the dependence on portables, providing a tangible solution to the overcrowding issue. In essence, the proposed projects are designed not only to address the pressing condition issues but also to enhance capacity significantly, providing relief to both middle and elementary schools.

Commissioner Cotham expressed disappointment about the limited time for questions but proceeded to thank Mr. Dennis LaCaria for the comprehensive information presented. She acknowledged the complexity of the data and commends Mr. LaCaria's evident understanding of the details. Commissioner Cotham raised questions about the meetings conducted, noting that there were around 83 in-person and a dozen virtual meetings between the end of 2022 and the

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beginning of the current year. Additionally, she mentions 1,250 attendees and seeks details about the meetings, such as duration, presenters, and topics discussed. Mr. Dennis LaCaria responded by providing a brief overview of the meeting dynamics. He mentioned the involvement of board members, including district-at-large members who participated virtually. The presentations covered various topics, with Walter Hall addressing magnets, Dr. Shue covering boundaries, and contributions from Mr. Schultz and Ms. Portee. The format involved both large group discussions and breakout sessions focusing on specific topics. Mr. LaCaria emphasized the commitment to one-on-one interactions, stating that they stayed until the last person left, even conducting over 90 meetings. He noted the extensive time spent, with dinners extending to 11 o'clock on most nights. Commissioner Cotham further inquired about the attendees, seeking to understand if there were any discernible trends in their questions or concerns. Mr. LaCaria responded by highlighting a positive trend – the community's understanding and support. Despite explaining the challenges and constraints, people acknowledged the genuine need, recognizing that the situation was not anyone's fault but rather a result of the state's funding structure.

Ms. Lisa Klein expressed appreciation for Mr. Dennis LaCaria's presentation but raises a concern regarding the ranking of middle schools and the perceived urgent need in Southwest Mecklenburg County. She questions whether the ranking is rigid and if there's flexibility to prioritize the issues in Southwest Charlotte. Mr. Dennis LaCaria responds by explaining the approach to prioritization, emphasizing the need for a creative solution. He highlighted Community House Middle School in the south as the largest middle school, surpassing those even in distant states. The relief for Community House is identified as a high priority. In the north, the focus is on addressing issues in multiple schools, including JMA, Bradley, Bailey, and Davidson. Mr. LaCaria stressed that all the projects are equally important, and there is no intention to deem one more crucial than another. The challenge lies in determining the timeline and initiating the projects efficiently. Ms. Lisa Klein then reinforced the impact on Quail Hollow, which is within her district and is also facing overcrowding. She acknowledged the potential need for reassignment in addressing these challenges. Mr. LaCaria assured her that the situation with Quail Hollow will become clearer as discussions progress on south middle school and high school boundaries, providing insights into the final resolution for Quail Hollow is.

Commissioner Jerrell expresses gratitude for the presentation and focuses on three main points: equity application in the decision-making process, handling non-supportive feedback, and ensuring safety in new facilities. He inquired about the approach to equity, community engagement, and the safety measures incorporated into the proposed projects. Mr. Dennis LaCaria responded by detailing the extensive community engagement efforts, including both in-person and virtual meetings, varied time slots, surveys, and outreach to specific schools and groups. He emphasized the importance of listening to community feedback and adjusting plans accordingly. On the question of equity, Mr. LaCaria explained that the educational environment was a crucial factor. The evaluation considered the impact of classroom conditions on teaching and learning, aiming to improve outcomes for students and create a positive environment for staff. He assured the Commissioner that safety measures, including single or limited points of entry, security vestibules, scanners, and crime prevention through environmental design, are

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integral components of each project. Commissioner Jerrell then quickly asked about the consequences of not implementing these projects, Mr. LaCaria highlighted the continued use of portables, deteriorating building conditions, overcapacity issues, and the delay in addressing future projects.

Board member Dee Rankin reiterated the importance of viewing the proposed facilities improvements as an investment in the future, specifically in the well-being of the students. Acknowledging the limitations due to budget constraints, Rankin expressed a desire to address all facility needs but recognized the need for prioritization. Mr. Dennis LaCaria responded to Rankin's question about the ramifications of not addressing the facility needs immediately. He explained that the responsibility falls on the school board to bridge the gaps created by rezoning and development decisions, as there is no financial support from the city or an adequate public facilities ordinance. LaCaria emphasized the challenge of playing catch-up with the rapid growth in the city and county, pointing out that falling behind would lead to increased use of portables and the inability to keep up with the changing demographic landscape. He underscored the importance of seizing the opportunity presented every five years to make significant strides in addressing the district's evolving needs. Mr. LaCaria expressed gratitude to the County Commission for the chance to work towards narrowing the gap caused by ongoing rezoning, population growth, and urban development, emphasizing the cyclical nature of the challenges faced by the district.

Commissioner Leake expressed gratitude for the presentation and highlighted concerns about the increasing enrollment in Charlotte Mecklenburg School System. During the discussion, Mr. Dennis LaCaria clarified that the current enrollment was approximately 142,000 K5, slightly up from the previous year. Commissioner Leake raised a concern about the practice of adding trailers to schools even before they open, questioning why schools aren't initially built to accommodate the expected student population. Mr. LaCaria explained that building to a specific size was a practical limitation, aiming for a manageable 45-classroom, 900-student elementary school. Commissioner Leake also brought attention to existing schools in the district, such as West Charlotte and Bruns, expressing disappointment that additions over the years had not addressed essential needs like new bathrooms. LaCaria responded by detailing plans for Northwest School of the Performing Arts, emphasizing the retention of the main building and the addition of new spaces for improved functionality. Concerns were raised about Waddell High School, with Leake expressing a fear of wasted money if the school wasn't used as intended. Mr. LaCaria assured that renovations would include new offices, admin space, and performing arts areas. Lastly, Commissioner Leake inquired about the plan to eliminate K-8 schools on the West side of town. Mr. LaCaria indicated that this was part of the ongoing discussions and planning, acknowledging different desires and needs in various communities but affirming an active pursuit to transition away from K-8s as neighborhood attendance boundaries.

Vice Chair Stephanie Sneed raised three questions regarding the 2017 bond projects. The first question inquired about the projects' adherence to the projected schedule. Mr. Dennis LaCaria responded by acknowledging a delay in the opening of Elon Park Elementary School, which was

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announced the day before. However, he clarified that the delay wouldn't impact the fiscal year and emphasized that overall, all projects were on schedule. The second question focused on understanding the process of determining escalated amounts. Mr. LaCaria explained that Mecklenburg County provided the escalation numbers based on factors such as project start date, delivery schedule, and cash flow. He emphasized the collaboration with the county in establishing these figures. The third question addressed perceived project imbalances across districts. Mr. LaCaria clarified that the planning was not district-centric but aimed at addressing the most critical needs. He emphasized prioritizing projects based on urgency rather than adhering to a predetermined distribution by district.

Chair George Dunlap commended the thorough job in determining the needs and appreciated the safety concerns in building new structures. He emphasized the importance of addressing the learning environment and the challenges faced by educators. However, his primary concerns revolved around the community's ability to undertake a \$3 billion project, considering competition with other construction activities in the area, and the capacity to spend the allocated funds over the projected lifespan of the plan, which he believed to be a 10-year plan. In response, Mr. Dennis LaCaria clarified that the plan was actually a five-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP). He explained that the focus was on projects that could be initiated and substantially completed within this timeframe. Despite the significant dollar amount, Mr. LaCaria highlighted that the value was substantial due to increased costs over the years. He mentioned that in 2007, a similar initiative would have been a \$600 million bond referendum, not \$3 billion. LaCaria emphasized the confidence in delivering the projects within the five-year CIP, acknowledging a potential hangover effect at the end. Chair George Dunlap raised the issue of the community's capacity to handle the financial burden and questioned if this factor had been considered in the funding request. Mr. LaCaria affirmed that it was indeed factored in, and the focus was on realistic projects that the community could bear. He provided an example, mentioning the exclusion of Albemarle Road Elementary School due to logistical challenges and the consideration of what could realistically be accomplished.

Chair Elyse Dashew refrained from asking numerous questions during the discussion, acknowledging that others had covered important inquiries. She emphasized the community's expressed desire for enhanced safety on school campuses and the need for buildings to be conducive to health. Ms. Dashew noted the increasing concerns about school security nationwide, particularly in light of recent events. Reflecting on the lessons from the pandemic, she highlighted the growing importance of having healthy school environments. Ms. Dashew pointed out the district's continued growth, contrasting it with the trend of shrinking in other districts across the nation. She mentioned that when the district opens new buildings, such as Palisades, they regain more market share than anticipated. Families, she noted, opt for private schools or charter schools due to concerns about overcrowded trailers or a preference for modern, purpose-built structures over aging ones. Despite acknowledging the substantial cost of the proposed bond, Ms. Dashew suggested that it might be necessary to win back market share, especially given the increased cost per square foot. Expressing her struggle with the large budget, she pondered the potential additional costs if the project were delayed. Ms. Dashew concluded by stating that she

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did not expect a response to her rhetorical question.

Vice-Chair Elaine Powell began her questions by addressing slide nine, expressing the need to ensure that the costs of intentionally designing and building school facilities based on current standards, including environmentally friendly features like solar panels, were accounted for. She emphasized the importance of considering window placement for safety in the context of healthy buildings. Vice-Chair Powell then brought attention to concerns in her district, particularly at Mountain Island Lake Academy. She stressed the significance of votes from every district for the bond package to pass and raised community feedback regarding overcrowding at Mountain Island Lake Academy. Powell sought a better understanding of how capacity issues were prioritized for the school. She also questioned the inclusion of Berry Hill, expressing concerns about its cost, logistics, and environmental impact in the Catawba area. In response, Mr. Dennis LaCaria addressed the environmental concerns related to Berry Hill, citing the need to transition from a septic system to city water and sewer to avoid potential mishaps. He explained the plan to work with Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation for site acquisition, emphasizing the environmental sustainability of the approach. Regarding capacity, Mr. LaCaria discussed the rebuilding of Berry Hill to accommodate the River District's growth and the opportunity to address capacity issues for the price of one. He also touched on plans to adjust grade levels at Mountain Island, making it an elementary school and reassigning middle school grades to a new Coulwood. Vice-Chair Powell requested additional information on Berry Hill's capacity before the discussion concluded.

Ms. Melissa Easley stated that she had reviewed the information several times. Drawing from her participation in numerous community engagements, both virtual and in-person across the county, she highlighted the overwhelmingly optimistic response from people who attended. Easley mentioned receiving positive feedback individually from participants. She addressed the issue of population growth in North Meck, noting that the area, particularly the Huntersville zip code 28270, was experiencing rapid expansion. Easley emphasized the necessity of relief schools and new facilities to stay ahead of the increasing population. She expressed excitement that these projects were prioritized to address the ongoing growth. Ms. Easley shared a personal story about her experience as a science teacher in CMS for 10 years, highlighting the lack of windows and doors in her classrooms. She expressed enthusiasm about the consideration given to classroom environments, particularly the importance of having windows. Ms. Easley concluded by thanking everyone for their efforts and time invested in the project.

Commissioner Altman Started her question by clarifying that the \$3 billion request was solely for facilities and did not cover operational expenses. She highlighted the ongoing community discussions about issues with CMS related to teaching and learning, emphasizing that the funds in question were designated for facilities only. Commissioner Altman acknowledged the desire to fund the entire original list but underscored the need to consider what residents could bear financially. They pointed out that both CMS and the county had substantial infrastructure needs, and she, as a county commissioner, was focused on balancing these needs with the financial burdens on residents. Commissioner Altman mentioned the additional challenges, including

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potential tax increases in municipalities and the importance of securing matching funds for the transit system to build a light rail system. Expressing her concerns about safety on CMS campuses, Commissioner Altman broadened the discussion to include open campuses with thousands of students, highlighting the need for security measures. She proposed funding a safety study for open campuses and expressed support for such initiatives as a county commissioner. In response, Mr. Dennis LaCaria addressed Commissioner Altman's concerns about open campuses, affirming that addressing safety on multi-building high school campuses was a priority. He mentioned specific schools like Garinger, Harding, East Mecklenburg, and South Mecklenburg, where efforts were focused on inward-facing transformations and campus replacements to improve security measures.

Ms. Thelma Byers-Bailey shared her perspective after seeing the proposal multiple times. She reflected on the impact of community input sessions, noting that breakouts were vigorous and led to additional events at schools where the entire parent community was invited to provide input. She inquired about the frequency of such additional input sessions. Mr. Dennis LaCaria responded, stating that there were more than 90 follow-on conversations, including the five hosted events and an additional 45. He mentioned the extensive efforts made by himself, Walter Hall, Dr. Schuch, and others to engage with the community. Ms. Byers-Bailey also expressed concern about the mention of solar panels at one of the schools and questioned if this would be a widespread initiative or just occasional. LaCaria explained that they are exploring various pathways to support renewable energies, mentioning a pilot project for solar domestic hot water at Bruns. However, he emphasized the organization's primary focus on education and the challenge of allocating funds between classrooms and solar panels, with a preference for classrooms.

Chair Elyse Dashew addressed Commissioner Griffin, acknowledging the circulated list of questions, and inviting him to highlight key points. Commissioner Griffin expressed concerns about unanswered questions from December 19th, focusing on prioritization, the impact on overall enrollment, and outstanding queries about his old high school. Mr. Dennis LaCaria responded, indicating plans for a 40-classroom building at Second Ward and collaboration with partnerships to support up to 2,000 students. He highlighted ongoing refinement of the model based on budget assumptions and new considerations. Commissioner Griffin pressed for prioritization of the 30 projects, but Mr. LaCaria stated they were currently of equivalent priority. Chair George Dunlap and Commissioner Griffin discussed the importance of prioritization for cost considerations during the bond referendum. Commissioner Griffin also inquired about the implications of the bond referendum on communities like Renaissance West and South Side homes. Mr. LaCaria addressed Ren West separately, emphasizing ongoing conversations. Regarding South Side homes, he expressed comfort with the direction of creating a more diverse attendance boundary. Dr. Crystal L. Hill explained that the rubric was used to identify issues and determine how to address them, leading to the selection of the 30 projects. She emphasized the need to collaborate with county staff to maximize resources based on the approved budget, recognizing the complexity of prioritizing projects with a fixed dollar amount.

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Ms. Lenora Shipp expressed familiarity with the proposal and shared a personal experience of transitioning from an old building to a new, state-of-the-art facility, emphasizing the positive impact on teaching and learning. She witnessed teachers aspiring to excel and students impressed with the new environment, noting an improvement in test scores after the move. Ms. Shipp highlighted community facelifts and increased enrollment in areas with new school buildings, recounting instances where parents opted for CMS over charter or private schools due to the appeal of modern facilities. She emphasized the community's need to invest in students and expressed strong support for the proposed projects. Ms. Shipp then posed a question about addressing the most egregious facilities and those on the brink. Mr. Dennis LaCaria acknowledged the existence of schools with conditions similar to the prioritized ones. He cited examples of extreme situations, such as schools without water and sewer or with accessibility issues. Mr. LaCaria explained that hard decisions were made based on the most urgent needs, significant gaps, and promising opportunities. Shipp thanked him for the response.

Ms. Jennifer De La Jara acknowledged the extensive outreach efforts to various community segments, including the Crescent, the Wedge, and both the North and South areas, with meetings held at different times. She commended Dr. Schultz for conducting a Spanish language session at the Charlotte East Language Academy. Ms. De La Jara highlighted the importance of community feedback and addressed instances of non-supportive sentiments, attributing them to misinformation. She shared an example of clarifying misconceptions about funding from the NC lottery during a presentation. Ms. De La Jara emphasized the need for community collaboration, including the commission, to overcome challenges arising from misinformation. Ms. De La Jara expressed gratitude for mentioning the impact on staff and emphasized the significance of providing quality facilities for educators, considering the county's status as the third-largest employer. She sought further elaboration on safety measures in the design of new buildings, particularly architectural features addressing safety concerns. Mr. Dennis LaCaria explained the comprehensive safety approach, considering factors such as driveway locations, building orientation, landscaping, and crime prevention through environmental design. She detailed the placement of cameras, the implementation of single points of entry, security vestibules with bullet-resistant glass, and controlled access to the building. Mr. LaCaria also mentioned security measures at bus and student entry points, emphasizing the integration of safety features beyond the building envelope.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell began by acknowledging the complexity highlighted in the presentation. She reiterated the importance of the built environment in influencing student outcomes, emphasizing that studies show it goes beyond mere aesthetics. She inquired about the number of projects in the 2017 bond, which Mr. Dennis LaCaria confirmed to be around 30, similar in size to the current proposal. Expressing concerns about the escalation process, Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell wanted more details, anticipating further information from Mr. Boyd's presentation. The commissioner then shifted her focus to regional athletics. She questioned the decision to invest millions in upgrading current schools if there is a transition planned for regional athletics. She suggested a quicker move to regional athletics to avoid extensive spending on

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individual schools. In response, Mr. LaCaria explained that the initial plan involved regional facilities, but community feedback indicated a preference for maintaining and upgrading existing school facilities. The community supported the long-term plan for regional athletics but wanted continued investments in their current schools. The decision to pursue both options was driven by community feedback and a recognition of their preferences.

Mecklenburg County Capital Improvement Plan Financial Update

Mr. David Boyd began his presentation:

Background: Mr. David Boyd, the CFO for Mecklenburg County, began by expressing gratitude to CMS staff and Dennis for their collaboration. He outlined the agenda, discussing the CIP development process, non-CMS projects, funding scenarios, taxpayer implications, and next steps. The CIP covers FY 24 to 28, five-year span, encompassing various departments like asset and facility management, Park and Rec, Central Piedmont Community College, the library system, and CMS. All departments were required to submit their requests in order to determine what the cost would be to fund each project and the development of a timeline for completion. An internal committee scored non-CMS projects, and citizen advisory committee input was gathered. The 135 projects were reduced to a list of 59 projects, totaling just under \$1.5 billion, were categorized by department and commissioner districts. Boyd detailed the current spending for CMS projects and the remaining funds from the 2017 referendum. The escalation factor was explained, considering inflation and contingencies. Boyd delved into funding options, discussing paying cash, issuing general obligation bonds, and using non-voted debt. The county's historical strategy involved geobonds for school-related projects and pay-go for non-school projects. The baseline assumptions for funding scenarios included normal revenue growth, a 100% bond funding assumption for CMS projects, and a 50/50 pay-go and debt split for county projects. The preliminary list amounted to \$2.6 billion for non-CMS projects. Boyd emphasized the importance of not exceeding responsible borrowing limits and maintaining a AAA bond rating. The presented scenarios involved tax increases to fund the capital plan. Boyd discussed the challenges posed by internal constraints like total outstanding debt, debt per capita, and debt service as a percentage of operating expenses. He proposed a five-year rolling CIP for better planning and flexibility. Boyd concluded by outlining next steps, including further model refinement, a detailed board meeting in April, and the need for LGC approval, highlighting potential challenges due to the significant size of the proposed referendum.

Chair George Dunlap brought up some important points before moving on to addressing questions. He highlighted the non-ranked nature of the CMS project order, clarifying that even if certain amounts were approved, CMS retained the right to change the order. He aimed to prevent any misunderstanding or frustration if the approved amount differed from the final allocation. Additionally, Chair Dunlap underscored the consideration of tax rate increases, specifying that these were additional taxes beyond the determined revenue-neutral rate, not modifications to the existing tax rate. He urged awareness of potential tax increases in various towns and the city,

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emphasizing the need to assess the overall tax implications across Mecklenburg County. Despite expressing a desire to share more information, Chair Dunlap concluded this part of the discussion and opened the floor for questions from CMS members, encouraging those with inquiries to raise their hands.

Discussion:

Ms. Jennifer De La Jara expressed appreciation for addressing potential concerns with the LGC, noting that Guilford County faced issues with untimely audits, a situation not mirrored in their case. She aimed to dispel worries about shared concerns and highlighted that despite their larger student body, they were requesting less funding than Guilford County, emphasizing the proportionality. Ms. De La Jara commended the County Commission's focus on equity, pointing out the demographic disparities between CMS and Mecklenburg County. Stressing the school's role in serving a high percentage of low socioeconomic students, she framed the investment in CMS as inherently an equity investment. Addressing equity concerns, she questioned the potential tax increase's impact on vulnerable residents and inquired about the fulfillment rate and usage of the Homes program. She suggested collaboration on a marketing campaign to raise awareness about tax relief opportunities, drawing parallels with the successful Affordable Connectivity program promotion. Ms. De La Jara expressed openness to supporting staff in communicating such opportunities to the community.

Ms. Summer Nunn raised several questions during the discussion, focusing on the confidence interval in the five-year escalation plan, the possibility of a rolling bond at a smaller frequency, the impact of borrowing above the 20% level, and the criteria for determining non-CMS projects. In response, Mr. David Boyd acknowledged the uncertainty in inflation and interest rate assumptions, emphasizing their reasonably conservative approach. Regarding the frequency of evaluations, he suggested potential opportunities for something different, with ongoing considerations. He confirmed discussions about the danger zone for borrowing and potential challenges in maintaining a AAA rating. Regarding the rubric for non-CMS projects, Mr. Boyd clarified that CMS projects were not directly ranked against other county-related projects. The evaluation focused solely on non-school-related projects due to extensive outreach on school projects. He mentioned the existence of a rubric, referring to a previous presentation for details.

Ms. Lenora Shipp raised a question concerning the city and town tax increases mentioned by Chairman George Dunlap. She emphasized the importance of considering these factors in the broader context of discussions about tax increases. Ms. Shipp highlighted the significance of investing in children's education and future, questioning if not now, then when. Chairman George Dunlap responded, explaining that the details of tax increases would be determined as each town and the city discussed their budget, and the final decision would be made when they adopted their respective budgets.

Mr. Dee Rankin sought clarification on slide 23 regarding debt capacity, expressing concern about

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potential rating issues if the county were to borrow more than 2.5. He inquired about past instances where the county reached this capacity without a change in rating. Mr. David Boyd responded, indicating that to his knowledge, the county had not been this close to exceeding AAA median levels for other AAA rated entities. County Manager Dena R. Diorio mentioned a past incident in 2008 when the county was almost downgraded due to exceeding certain metrics. She added that the county was downgraded by Fitch but successfully appealed the downgrade in New York by addressing the triggered metrics.

Ms. Stephanie Sneed expressed curiosity about the project listing on page nine, specifically how the order of the 1 billion, 2 billion, 2.5 billion, and 3 billion cutoff lists was determined. Mr. David Boyd clarified that the projects were presented in the order sent by Dennis and generally aligned with the slated start dates. He emphasized that the list was not the CMS ranking order but rather reflected the sequence of project initiation. Ms. Sneed sought clarification on the possibility of adjusting escalation projections during the projects, affecting the funding amount, and potentially adding more schools to the list. Mr. David Boyd explained that he was collaborating with Dennis and CMS staff to review and refine the projections before finalizing. The goal was to ensure accuracy in timing, cash flow, and project completion feasibility. He also mentioned the ongoing assessment of factors like project costs, interest rates, and inflation, with the potential for adjustments based on new information or changes in estimates.

Ms. Elyse Dashew sought clarification regarding slide eight, specifically regarding projects labeled as "CIP projects still in progress." She noted that some schools listed were already completed with students in classrooms. Mr. David Boyd acknowledged the confusion and clarified that the term "still in progress" referred to projects where the full budget amount had not been spent, and they were still processing payments for unfinished aspects. He acknowledged that "progress" might be the wrong term in this context.

Ms. Thelma Byers-Bailey expressed gratitude and mentioned that she had been comparing the school board's list to the county's list. She specifically noted a discrepancy on page nine, where University Park Creative Arts was listed as a K-8 school. She was advised against directly comparing the two lists, emphasizing that the school board's project list is distinct, and adjustments can be made accordingly. The speaker suggested that programmatic issues might be less relevant to the overall Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

Vice-Chair Elaine Powell inquired about the history of the Local Government Commission (LGC) and whether they have ever rejected a proposal. Mr. David Boyd responded, stating that most challenges are typically resolved at the staff level. He mentioned that some complex cases, including not only county and city debt but also hospital-related ones, might face difficulties. Mr. Boyd noted that there was a recent instance involving a hospital project that did not receive approval. However, he emphasized that, in general, issues are usually worked through at the staff level before reaching the commission for approval.

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Commissioner Leake sought clarification on the relationship between funds allocated for building projects and potential requests for additional funds by the school for non-building-related issues. Chair George Dunlap clarified that the bond package strictly addressed building projects. If CMS had other financial needs, they would have to approach the county separately for those funds. Chair Dunlap emphasized that they were currently discussing the tax rate for capital improvement projects and that operational budget requests from CMS or the county could lead to additional tax implications. This raised the possibility of a higher tax increase beyond the initially discussed one, depending on the combination of approved requests.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell sought clarification on the back-loading principle, specifically addressing the cumulative nature of projections on slide 21. Mr. David Boyd explained that the bottom line represents cumulative figures. The commissioner expressed discomfort with projecting too far into the future and questioned the implications of smoothing out the tax increases. Mr. Boyd clarified that the projections focused on projects starting within the five-year window and emphasized the need to understand when these projects could physically be executed. Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell further inquired about the ability to project accurately, considering the scheduled revaluation in 2027. Mr. Boyd explained that the timing of projects needed to align with when they could be realistically carried out. The commissioner clarified if the idea was to avoid borrowing money too early to prevent paying interest on unused funds. Mr. Boyd affirmed this, highlighting the importance of deferring borrowing as much as possible and weighing the impact on project costs against interest rates. He further emphasized the necessity of taking a long-term viewpoint in capital planning, considering the 20-year implications of borrowing decisions. He pointed out that understanding the long-term implications was crucial for informed decision-making. Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell questioned if future boards could reject the proposed tax increases, but Chair Dunlap indicated that their time for questions had ended.

Commissioner Jerrell expressed the need for a comprehensive understanding of the operational implications of the presented scenarios, emphasizing the importance of considering both the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and operations. He urged staff collaboration to reveal the burden distribution and suggested sharing assumptions when combining CIP and operational considerations. Commissioner Jerrell proposed a joint effort to understand and address the impacts on the community, stressing the need for clarity on who would be affected by the proposed plans. Chair George Dunlap acknowledged the fairness of Commissioner Jerrell's concerns and suggested the possibility of both boards reconvening before budget adoption to ensure better understanding as assumptions evolve. He also highlighted the dynamic nature of revenue projections. A solution was then offered for county commissioners to email any unanswered questions to Charles Jeter, who would coordinate with Dr. Hill and her staff to provide comprehensive responses.

Commissioner Altman addressed the question of whether children are worth the investment, expressing an unequivocal yes on behalf of her Board and the community. She highlighted the complexity of balancing needs that directly benefit children, citing concerns from park and

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greenway advocates who felt their needs were inadequately addressed. Commissioner Altman emphasized the significant belt-tightening efforts made by the county, acknowledging outreach from residents who believed certain needs were overlooked. They emphasized the delicate balance between addressing needs for children and considering the impact on economically fragile individuals. Commissioner Altman recognized that raising the tax rate could disproportionately affect economically vulnerable residents due to changes in property values, particularly through gentrification. She appreciated the collaborative conversation with school board colleagues, recognizing the importance of understanding the broader context to meet the holistic needs of the community's children.

Ms. Summer Nunn inquired about the use of general obligation bonds for schools compared to pay-as-you-go for non-school projects, expressing a need for community education on the funding process. David Boyd explained that financially, borrowing allows for funding more schools over a more extended period compared to paying in cash. She then questioned the equity of tax increases, asking if the county commission could implement them in a more equitable manner. David Boyd clarified that the law does not permit such differentiation in tax increases based on economic status, providing a straightforward answer to Summer Nunn's query.

In his closing remark, Chair George Dunlap emphasized the need for additional questions to be sent in for further clarification. He highlighted the importance of consulting with respective staff and sharing information between both bodies. Acknowledging the tax implications on the community, he stressed the significance of educating themselves about the broader context of Mecklenburg County.

Ms. Elyse Dashew expressed the challenges of balancing real needs for safe classrooms and facilities with the tax implications, considering the community's growth and socioeconomic dynamics. She acknowledged the difficulty faced by the commissioners in deciding the responsible amount to invest.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the Board, Chair Dunlap declared the meeting adjourned at 12:06 p.m.

Kristine M. Smith, Clerk to the Board

George Dunlap, Chair