

At a budget workshop meeting of the Southampton County Board of Supervisors held at Southampton High School, 23350 Southampton Parkway, Courtland, Virginia on May 18, 2015 at 7:00 PM.

SUPERVISORS PRESENT

Dallas O. Jones, Chairman (Drewryville)  
Ronald M. West, Vice Chairman (Berlin-Ivor)  
Dr. Alan W. Edwards (Jerusalem)  
Glenn H. Updike (Newsoms)  
Carl J. Faison (Boykins-Branchville)  
Barry T. Porter (Franklin)  
S. Bruce Phillips (Capron)

SUPERVISORS ABSENT

OTHERS PRESENT

Michael W. Johnson, County Administrator (Clerk)  
Lynette C. Lowe, Deputy County Administrator/ CFO  
Richard E. Railey, Jr., County Attorney  
Amanda N. Smith, Administrative Assistant

OTHERS ABSENT

Julien W. Johnson, Jr. Public Utilities Director  
Beth Lewis, Director of Community Development

Chairman Jones called the budget public hearing to order. Good evening everyone. At this time we will have the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

After the pledge, Supervisor Faison gave the invocation.

Chairman Jones states thank you ladies and gentlemen for coming out. The first speaker tonight will be Mrs. Francis.

Mrs. Allison Francis addressed the board. Good evening Mr. Johnson, Chairman Jones, and other Board of Supervisor members. I was told since I was the first one I could speak for thirty minutes, but I said I won't do that tonight. My name is Allison Francis and I reside in Capron, Virginia. I am the principal at Capron Elementary but I am also the parent of three graduates of Southampton County Public School System. My oldest one has graduated from Virginia Tech. She has recently graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with her Masters. She is currently the Executive Director for Smart Beginnings for the Franklin/Southampton area. My second child has graduated from Virginia Tech; recently graduated with her Masters from William and Mary. She is currently a teacher in Midlothian, Virginia. My youngest one; he just finished his first year at American University and I am proud to say he has been on the Dean's List for both semesters. Why I brag to you about my children? It is because of this school system that we have, my children have been this successful. When you talk about small classroom sizes; that has helped them. The programs that our schools provide especially in the High School with AP and Dual Credit classes and the resources that we provide; the clubs that my children were in and the extracurricular activities; these are the things that we need to continue to provide to all of our students in Southampton County so when they graduate they are ready for college or ready for the career world. For my three children and for the children that are currently in school, we thank you for your continuous support that you have given Southampton County Public Schools. Thank you.

Chairman Jones states thank you. He called on Mrs. Florence Reynolds.

Mrs. Florence Reynolds states I will pass.

Chairman Jones states that is all that is on my list. Is there anyone else that would like to come forward and speak?

Mr. John Burchett addressed the board. Good evening; my name is John Burchett and I live in Sebrell. We all know it is a done deal and you have decided what you are going to do. I still believe in this great country we need to say what we are thinking. I know a few people that were here Saturday night for the school's program; it was a blessing. This place was packed. I think if the parents knew what was going on in Courtland they would be here tonight, but they don't know. They depend on us to take care of their children. I also had the honor of going to the home school graduation at Tucker Swamp Baptist Church a couple of weeks ago. The one thing you saw at the home school graduation was a lot of love and the same is here in Southampton. What concerns me are the children that are coming out of Southampton Meadows and Oak Trail; most of those children when they look at somebody in the morning, the most love they will get is when they get to school with the teachers. I thank God for the teachers. We can't thank them enough. I have taken my granddaughter to Riverdale and the teachers there greet her and tell her have a good day. You know, a teacher can never have a bad day. A teacher can never show that they are having a bad day. They always have to be upbeat and happy. It makes the kids feel good about themselves. There is not much more I can say except Mr. Porter, Mr. Faison, and Mr. Jones I appreciate your support in the vote a couple of weeks ago for the schools. God will bless you for it I am sure. I told Dr. Parrish recently after her presentation that you couldn't pay me enough to do her job, but I am thankful that she does her job because she does a great job. They have built a tremendously successful school system. What really worries me, they are going to educate our kids. I don't have any doubt. My granddaughter is going to get what she needs. My concern, like Mrs. Francis talked about; extracurricular activities, something has to be cut. The kids go to school to learn but they also go to have a good time. Anyway, I do appreciate your support. Thank you.

Chairman Jones states thank you. He called on Dr. Alvera Parrish.

Dr. Alvera Parrish, Superintendent of Southampton County Public Schools, addressed the board. Chairman Jones and members of the board, good evening. My name is Alvera J. Parrish and I am Superintendent of Southampton County Public Schools. First of all I want to say thank you for what you have done to support the school system the previous year. We do appreciate all of your hard work and the support that you have provided for Southampton County Public Schools in the past. We recognize this year is a different kind of year in terms of revenue for you as it is a different kind of year in terms of revenue for us. We have been impacted by reduced state revenue and of course we are continuously trying to make sure that we keep that level of excellence for the education that we provide our students at the highest level, and we will do so. I want to say whenever you are going to provide opportunities for students, we do need resources and personnel; we do need other resources that supports us being able to educate the children. You can't do it without the financial support. I do want to thank those of you who have supported the school system thus far and have continued to try to work with us and understand where we are. I think we have developed a wonderful relationship as we have worked together; our two boards, our two entities together to help the children of Southampton to be contributing members to society, but most importantly contributing members to Southampton County. This year in spite of the drop in state revenue, after we went back and worked together through our budget liaison meetings and the various opportunities we had to work together we made a final request to the board with much sacrifice of \$198,543 which is a 1.73% increase over level funding. As you know, from your retreat from our initial request we have made a considerable reduction in the request that we made. I appreciate Chairman Jones and Supervisor Porter for the time they have spent one on one talking with us and looking at various options on how we can get this done. I recognize again, as I expressed to you individually and as a board as well, where you are in terms of revenue. It is so unfortunate that you have a tremendous task in front of you. However, we have a tremendous task in front of us as well. I am required as the instructional leader and the leader of the School Division to make sure that we provide those opportunities for the children of the citizens of this community. Even with the request that we are making to you tonight, we are still experiencing a severe amount of reductions. I have already shared that with you and won't waste your time in doing that again tonight. But, in terms of the reduction and what we are asking for, we are still going to be experiencing a reduction of seven elementary teacher positions, one secondary teacher position, a custodian position, one Information Technology technician position, many impacts on our instructional programs such as special education, contracted services, math programs, reading programs, and professional development programs are all being reduced. Our technology

department as well as our operations department is all being impacted by the request that we have made. So, not to give us this request, I will say to you, we will have a tremendous challenge in front of us. I thank Mr. Burchett for what he said and he is correct. The greatest resource we have is the staff, the teachers, and the people in this county. Our teachers and staff are so committed. They come every day as you would say with their "A" game. They give the very best that they have. I know you have to divide one pie into many parts but your children are your future. So goes the school system, so goes this county. I have said that since the first day I have been here. So, I say to you tonight, please give every consideration possible. I recognize the other variables that are attached to this particular year and I understand that as well from a political standpoint. However, our children are too valuable for that to be the main variable we consider going forward. So, I ask you to please go back and rethink it, reconsider it, look at it one more time; pray, meditate, whatever you need to do to spend that time to think about the request that we made. How we have spent the time to reduce it to the number we have reduced it to; from a 7% increase in request to 1.73% increase in request is what we are asking. We ask you again, the members on this board who represents the citizens of this county; these are their children that we are trying to educate. We ask that you please reconsider. Look at everything before you make your final decision and let's put the children first. Thank you so much for your time and we do appreciate whatever you can do to help the school division as we implement the budget in this school year. Again, I want to say I am very appreciative of the relationship that has been developed over the time we have been together. I am looking forward to building an even stronger relationship and working together. We have to work together. We are too small not to. We all are just one. We just want to help the county move forward by helping the children to be successful. Thank you so much.

Chairman Jones states thank you Dr. Parrish. He called on Christopher Smith.

Mr. Christopher Smith addressed the board. Good evening Mr. Jones, Mr. Johnson, other board members I am here to ditto what Dr. Parrish and the other speakers have spoken about. I am not going to speak to the school issue specifically. What I want to say is this county; the county that I love and feel so good about needs growth. We need to get the problem of not growing out of the equation. We have been blessed in Southampton County to have some of the richest soil in the world and the Chesapeake Bay created that situation many years ago. This soil has produced some of the best peanuts that the world has ever known. But, we have to now change. We have to grow this county. If I could say anything to the board tonight that I would like to see done, that is a task force needs to be implemented. Need to bring together a group to work on growing Southampton. We need know it can grow because as I stated earlier we have the richest soil in the world. We need to grow this county. We can no longer expect peanuts and corn alone to do for us what it did 20, 30 years ago. We have young children in our county that we need to take care of. We need to do some things to that effect. Whatever it takes; I worked my last 8, 9 years at the college over in Isle of Wight County and as a Dean of that site I was on one of the task force that Isle of Wight County had put together. It was strange that everyone on a growth committee was over 55 years old. We need to form a blended task force that will bring in some young people and have a blended committee to look at some ideas, thoughts, and ways of growing this county. If we are not growing, we are dying. So, let's do what we can to bring some growth to this county. Thank you for your time.

Chairman Jones states thank you Mr. Smith. He called on Greg Scott.

Mr. Greg Scott addressed the board. Good evening board members. My name is Greg Scott and I am a part of Southampton County. I was born and raised in Sedley, Virginia. I am a product of Southampton County Public School System. I have been able to achieve some wonderful things in my life. I was drafted into the NFL in 2002 with the Washington Redskins, pick 234. I stayed with them for two years and then I was able to go play with the Cincinnati Bengals for three years. After my injury, I was able to come back home and start a foundation, Cover 3 Foundation. I am here tonight because I am Southampton County. Everywhere I have been, I have taken Southampton County with me. Some of the basic fundamental principles I have learned throughout all of these school houses coming up in my time; Courtland Elementary, Southampton Middle, and Southampton High School. During my time, Mr. Turner was the Superintendent, but I see a lot of similarities between Dr. Parrish and Mr. Turner; the passion to help young kids succeed at any cost. They have a wonderful spirit about helping people and I too have that same spirit. If I could ask you to do anything tonight; I don't think we can put a price on helping our children be successful. That is totally priceless. Let's continue working together to make the school system a

wonderful place. I would ask that you approve the budget as submitted because of the leadership that is provided in our school system. There are a lot of Greg Scott's out here in the school system, but they won't be able to achieve the success that they need if we are taking people out of the school system and have less people dealing with our children day to day. That is one of the reasons I was successful because there was so many good people in the schools that constantly kept Greg Scott in line and I am truly thankful for those people day in and day out. They helped to build the foundation that I stand on as a man today. I thank you all for the system that you have provided for Southampton County because everywhere I go and everywhere I have been, Southampton County is known for having a wonderful school system. People speak highly of us wherever we go and I know we all want to see that continue and I know we all will keep doing the necessary things to make sure that continues. Thank you for your time.

Chairman Jones states thank you Mr. Scott. That is all that was on the sign-up sheet. Does anyone else have anything to say? You are welcome to come up front. If not, I will start with Mr. West. Do you have any comments?

Supervisor West states not at this time.

Chairman Jones called on Supervisor Faison.

Supervisor Faison states I certainly have heard what everyone has said here this evening. As far as the schools, I share your concerns and I am interested and doing all that we can for the schools.

Chairman Jones called on Supervisor Phillips.

Supervisor Phillips states I would like to thank the people that have taken their time to come tonight to express their concerns; both the School Board and the Board of Supervisors. That is what makes this system that we have work. The interaction between the public and citizens that is how we know what we need to do. This is a small community and that has been touched on tonight. We do need to grow this county. This board has done what I consider a good job the past four years to make Southampton business friendly. We have had over \$100 million in development in our tenure. I understand that farming has been the backbone of this community. We see that there is a need to further add to our economic base. We are trying to add growth to this community. I also see that our budget will cost the school system \$198,000. During the process since we had our initial budget retreat; The School's Superintendent, Chairman, and Mr. Porter have been able to adjust the numbers down where now they are at a 1.7% increase which equates to \$198,000 above level funding. This is a difficult situation and a difficult time. We have zero dollars in growth in the county's budget this year. I am still listening and I will listen. I am concerned for the future of our schools and I will maintain that concern; I am still listening.

Chairman Jones called on Supervisor Edwards.

Supervisor Edwards states I don't have a whole lot to say except what I have said before. I will echo what my colleague just said. We know it is a break-even year. We didn't make any more money than we did the year before. I feel we have given you everything that we can give you. We don't have any more. I would love to give you everything you want but it is just not there.

Chairman Jones called on Supervisor Updike.

Supervisor Updike states I think this budget has been thoroughly discussed. Everybody has worked hard. There hasn't been a rock turned over that has come up with some money. We can't think about one segment of the county; a particular population. We have to think about everyone. We are supposed to be representing every citizen in the county. People that are on low and fixed income; I can't personally ask them for additional funds when they can't put food on the table or clothes on their back. We will have to find additional sources of income. You can never satisfy everybody. I think we have discussed every detail over and over again. I am deeply sorry that we don't have a money tree to take additional funds off of.

Chairman Jones called on Supervisor Porter.

Supervisor Porter states this budget makes me sad. There are a lot of things about it; we need

growth in the county. We have people in the county that are fighting for it. Then we have some people that don't understand what they do; what they say. We have locals in the community that say we don't want this, we don't want that. We have to change this attitude. We have to be more welcoming because if we don't get five or six businesses with the magnitude of Enviva over the next ten years we will be looking at a tax rate that is probably 100% higher than it is today. Now, we have people sitting here saying we don't need businesses. Well, you are going to have one or the other. You are going to have a higher tax rate or you are going to welcome businesses. It would be nice to go through a budget cycle that is not painful. This has been one of the most painful budget cycles. I appreciate Dr. Parrish and the School Board for the efforts they have done. Yes, I spent a lot of time with those people working on their budget. I know what they have asked for is the absolute minimum that they need to continue the programs and the progress that we have made. Anything less we are going to degrade the future education of our children. This week I had a person come up to me and said I understand you are the only supervisor on the board that voted for a tax increase this year. Tell me why you did it and where did you get that kind of an attitude. I looked at him and I said yes, I voted for a tax increase. I voted for a tax increase of one cent. You know, that one cent was to save three teachers. The current proposed budget from the school system already eliminates eight instructional positions; eight. No tax increase means three more. So, you are telling me eliminating 11 instructional positions in our school system will not have a significant impact on the ability of our system to be able to provide the services to our students to be successful. Yes, I voted for a tax increase. Yes, I voted to save three teaching positions. Yes, I voted to support the schools. You know, I hate tax increases as much as anybody. Last year we voted for two cent tax increase because we recognized a need for the emergency services in order to provide to the citizens of the county. That was important enough to do that. This year, if it wasn't an election year, it might be different. Saving three of 11 instructor positions to me is just as important as providing three extra EMS services. If someone wants to vote me out of office because I voted for a one cent tax increase which is \$15 per average household; by the way, two months ago I had announced I was not going to run this election year because I have a lot of personal obligations I am not taking care of; I can't get to because of the way I do my job. I am just not efficient enough to do everything I need to do and do this job how it needs to be done. This week a lot of you talked to me to try to get me to reconsider. Well, this week I did reconsider and the reason is because my vision of what I want Southampton County to be ten years from now is not what it is now. I don't want it to be a struggling county. I want it to be a county that is growing and has the resources where everyone can stand and say I am proud to be from Southampton. I am proud but the issue is if you want to throw me out of office because I voted to save three teachers then do it. I am not here for Barry Porter. I am here to try to do what is right for the county. If you don't want me to do that, it's fine, but I am not going to let re-election issues clog my judgment as to doing the right thing. My intent is to save at least those three teachers. Mr. Chairman, I am going to move that tonight we amend the draft budget and increase the tax rate one cent and dedicate it to the school system for their instructional budget to save three teachers. Number one we can re-advertise the budget and if we don't approve the budget next week we can approve it at our June meeting.

Chairman Jones states gentlemen you heard the motion, is there a second?

Supervisor Faison seconded the motion.

Supervisor Edwards states Mr. Chairman I would like to challenge if that is legal or not. As far as I know that is illegal.

Supervisor Porter states I will refer to Mr. Johnson as to whether or not this is permitted in this format.

Mr. Michael Johnson states where you are right now you have advertised the total budget of \$55,799,534 and you have advertised a proposed real estate tax rate of .77 cents. You cannot go up on that without a public hearing. So, you would have to re-advertise the budget and the real estate tax rate. There will have to be another public hearing before you can act on that.

Supervisor Porter states but it is legal to do that now.

Mr. Michael Johnson states yes. You will have to go back and go through the same steps... What is your draft budget... What is your proposed rate. Advertise and receive comment and then vote

on it.

Supervisor Porter states my motion was to amend the draft budget; re-advertise for a public hearing to include a one cent tax increase. That is the motion that is on the table at this time.

Supervisor West states you are saying one cent?

Supervisor Porter states yes; .77 cents to .78 cents.

Chairman Jones states any other comments?

Supervisor Updike states I think we should have an attorney look into this before we make any motions. I have talked to people and they say once it is advertised you cannot go up on the rates. For this board to even consider going back on the vote they had on Wednesday.

Supervisor West states may I interject sir. We cannot vote on one cent tonight. We can consider that this evening in order to vote on it another time.

Mr. Michael Johnson states that is correct. If you prefer to wait until your regular meeting next month with the attorney present there is no harm done in that.

Supervisor West states sir I am certainly not questioning because what you said sounds correct, and thank you for your knowledge in that. But, I do feel under the circumstances, Tuesday which is one week from tomorrow would be a more appropriate time to consider that. Then, after that meeting we can re-advertise if needed. But, we cannot vote for a one cent increase tonight. The bottom line is we can't do it, but we can consider the proposal and vote on it later.

Supervisor Porter states the bottom line is you are ignoring the advice of the person that understands the statute. My motion is not to raise the tax rate my motion is to re-advertise the draft budget with an amended tax rate. As far as my understanding of what Mr. Johnson said, that is completely consistent with the statute.

Chairman Jones states Mr. Johnson can we do this?

Mr. Michael Johnson states yes sir.

Chairman Jones called for the vote. Supervisor Faison and Supervisor Porter voted yes. Supervisor Phillips, Supervisor Edwards, Supervisor West, and Supervisor Updike voted no. The motion was not passed.

Chairman Jones states okay so are we going to have another meeting?

Supervisor Edwards states we voted not to do it.

Chairman Jones states I was just asking if you wanted to have another meeting.

Supervisor Porter states we know the results and I apologize to the schools because I know this will cause you pain and I am sorry. I wish I could make it up to you. Thank you for what you do.

Supervisor Edwards states everyone has to realize the real problem here is the state. The state short changed the schools in this county 3.6% this year. We made up as much as we can. We had an even year. We had \$24,000 and that went down the drain. We broke even this year. Next year it looks like it will be as much as 5.8% lower. There has to be a place where we draw the line and say we can't keep doing this. As a businessman I have to do it, he has to do it; everybody up here has to do it. I would love to give the schools everything they want but the schools are going to have to run like a business also. It is the state. We need to replace some of these people up there at the state level. These states elections... They are cutting 3.6% this year and 5.8% next year and nobody hardly says anything about it.

Supervisor West states I would like to point out the approximately annual increase in budget we are offering you five new buses this upcoming year totaling approximately \$70,000 a year for that

additional capital improvement. It is not totally ignoring the need. We made a commitment to the school system to replace school buses about three years ago and this will be the third year we will be able to provide additional transportation needs. I would like to point that out tonight. But, in every home and people that I have talked to in general are hurting. All of our neighbors' taxes are going up and it is really upsetting to a number of people that don't know where the next dollar is coming from to pay the taxes. You brought up a few minutes ago the cost of the tax increase per house; \$15 average for a \$150,000 house. But still, most houses sit on some property and there are other things involved like their maintenance. There is much more to it. I wish there was money but there is none. Mr. Smith is right. We do need to grow businesses. We are trying but we need cooperation throughout the county; public citizens to help us when we need to be open to certain locations. Dr. Parrish I trust you, but I also saw the need to hold the line with the citizens in the county at this time. Thank you.

Supervisor Faison states I agree with everyone tonight. The problem is the school system is dealing with a decrease from the state, but that doesn't change the situation we are in whether it is the state's fault or whoever's fault it is. In regards to the tax increase, I voted for the tax increase last week at our last meeting. Again, I did that because I thought it would be the right thing to do. I am sorry that it didn't carry because I know that the schools need it. As far as the citizens of the county, I know a lot of people who certainly fall into the category who can't afford it or are in poverty. They don't complain about the tax increase. They don't have an allotment for real estate. The way I look at it and I try to look at it fairly, it is not the poor people in the county we talk about helping. I don't think raising the taxes will hurt those people we say we are protecting all of the time. I am sorry we can't do more for the schools because I know the schools need it. It was a pleasure for me to send my kids to Southampton County Schools; all five of them. I wish all of my grandkids could go to Southampton County Schools.

Supervisor Porter states I think we have beaten this horse to death. We have to stand up and decide what is important. I have three priorities while I am on this board; education, safety, and economic growth. They all fit together. If you don't have a good education system, you can't attract new businesses. Sometimes you have to pay today to make more revenue later. You can't look at this year. You have to look ten years out. It's not where you are it's where you want to be. I think that is the kind of thing that we don't have enough of. It really upsets me when people get up here and talk about the citizens. I talked with people this weekend when I was going around getting signatures when I decided I was going to rerun for office. Not a single one said they didn't support saving the teachers. I tell you what, I will bet voting against saving the teachers creates more of a negative impact than voting to increase the real estate tax rate one cent and somebody will have to answer to that. I wonder what voters want. Do they want a county that is dying? Do they want a county that has increasing tax rates just to pay for basics? The basics are going to get worse and worse; or do we want a bright future. Sometimes I wonder. Sometimes I get frustrated. Sometimes I just cry and this is the time that I am crying because I feel like we let the schools down. I think people are so afraid that somebody is going to run against them and they are going to lose their job that they are afraid to stand up and do the right thing. The right thing for the future of Southampton County was to save at least those three teachers. What I would like to do is save all eleven, but we can't save all eleven; but we did have the resources where we could have saved three teachers and that makes me very sad.

Chairman Jones states okay is there anyone else?

There was no response.

Chairman Jones states I would like to say thank you all for coming and thank you for your comments. I would like to say I have been on this board for quite a while and every year that I have been here I have been for the schools. If there is anything I can do to help them I am ready to do it. The people we are talking about are the people that will be sitting up here when we are not here and we don't know what it's going to look like. We have to do what we have to do. I wish we had the money to give you. You need to tell your neighbors when we ask them about selling land for a business to let us have it. Let us get these businesses in here. We can't get them in the county if we don't have the land to put them on. You say we need businesses and we do need businesses but we don't have anywhere to put them. Our business park right now is full. We have about 40 acres left. We need the citizens to let us buy their property when we get a client that wants it. With that, are there any other comments? If there is nothing else this meeting is adjourned.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

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Dallas O. Jones, Chairman

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Michael W. Johnson, Clerk