

CHARLOTTESVILLE CITY COUNCIL
Joint Work Session with Charlottesville City School Board
September 15, 2021
SCHOOL RECONFIGURATION
Virtual/electronic meeting via Zoom

6:30 PM WORK SESSION

The Charlottesville City Council met on Wednesday, September 15, 2021, for a joint budget work session with the Charlottesville City School Board to hear a presentation and discuss school reconfiguration and budget. The meeting was held electronically pursuant to a local ordinance amended and re-enacted on April 19, 2021, to ensure the continuity of government and prevent the spread of disease during the coronavirus pandemic.

Nikuyah Walker, Mayor, called the Charlottesville City Council to order at 6:36 p.m. Clerk of Council Kyna Thomas called roll and noted the following members present: Mayor Nikuyah Walker, Vice Mayor Sena Magill and Councilors Heather Hill and Michael Payne.

Lisa Torres, Chair, called the City of Charlottesville School Board meeting to order and noted a quorum present. Clerk Julia Green conducted School Board roll call. Ms. Torres introduced new Schools Superintendent Royal Gurley.

Mayor Walker turned the meeting over to Wyck Knox, representing the design company VMDO. Mr. Knox shared a presentation, beginning with a historical view of city schools. He advised that VMDO would present:

1. Recommended approach on scope and budget at Buford starting in 2023,
2. Recommended approach on scope and budget for PreK to temporarily occupy Walker building A in 2026, and
3. Recommended approach to build a future new PreK center at Walker.

Councilors and Board members asked questions about ages of buildings reconfigured in other cities, reconfiguration versus new build, and classroom capacity.

Kristen Hill, VMDO, shared information about the Working Group and Community Design Team, as well as what defines success for the process:

- Achieve reconfiguration
- Prioritize the student experience
- Community driven design

Maria Bninski, VMDO Project Architect for Walker, presented improvement ideas for preparing Walker Building “A” as a Temporary Preschool Facility.

Councilor Lloyd Snook joined the meeting at 7:51 p.m.

Mr. Knox presented options for Buford Middle School reconfiguration.

Option 1: Renovate More, Build Less

Option 2: Big Room/Build Compactly

Option 3: Build in the Bowl

He then contrasted costs for renovation versus reconstruction and deferred maintenance. He advised that deferred work is subject to additional inflation and phased work is more expensive.

City Manager Chip Boyles and Krisy Hammill, Senior Budget and Management Analyst, presented funding scenarios, including options for removing existing Capital Improvement Projects and increasing taxes.

City Council and the School Board engaged in discussion about such topics as:

- City's reserve policy
- Funding multiple programs such as CHAP (Charlottesville Housing Assistance Program) with taxes
- Tax-equivalence
- Bond capacity versus bond exceeded
- General Fund capacity
- Reprogramming funds for projects currently listed in the Capital Improvement Plan
- Achieving other City goals such as affordable housing and equity
- City strategic planning

Chris Cullinan, Finance Director, provided an explanation of the use of American Rescue Plan funds.

In response to questions from Mayor Walker, Michael Goddard, Senior Project Manager - Facilities Development, added that savings from reallocating maintenance costs from Buford and Walker to fund debt services would be minimal.

Jim Henderson, Acting Superintendent, reiterated the community desire since 2007 for reconfiguration.

Council agreed that the West Main Street project and parking garage would not move forward, given other priorities.

Mr. Knox advised that VMDO would bring a report to City Council on October 4.

Kim Powell, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations, answered a financial question for Councilor Magill regarding State funding and impacts of a local tax rate increase.

Mr. Knox summarized next steps for VMDO.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Walker opened the meeting for public comment.

- Michael Joy, city resident, parent and licensed architect, shared support for the information presented by the consultant team.
- Chris Meyer, city resident and parent, spoke of the prioritization of school modernization and the need for action sooner than later.
- Michael Allen, band director at Buford Middle School, spoke of challenges facing students and the need to reconfigure the school to accommodate current and future students and equipment.
- Holly Hatcher, city resident and parent, affirmed comments about equity through support of public education, advocating at the statewide level, and parent support.
- Annie Suttle, city resident, parent and member of the Community Design Team spoke of the urgency to act, and the desire for local parents to help.

School Board members James Bryant and Lashundra Bryson Morsberger made final comments.

Superintendent Gurley shared that children learn best in quality facilities and thanked all for their time working on the project.

Councilors made closing comments.

Mayor Walker adjourned the meeting of City Council at 9:52 p.m., immediately followed by adjournment of the School Board meeting.

BY Order of City Council

BY Kyna Thomas, Clerk of Council