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FEATURED

Caroline commissioners hear support for new Greensboro elementary

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 Proposed new Greensboro Elementary School

This artist's rendering shows the proposed new Greensboro Elementary School.

DENTON — At a public hearing for a bond bill that will authorize the Caroline County commissioners to issue \$23 million in bonds for three capital projects, the commissioners heard only support.

The hearing was held Tuesday, Aug. 27, during the commissioners' regular meeting.

The bill will be up for a third reading and potential enactment at the commissioners' next meeting, Tuesday, Sept. 10.

The bill will allow the county to move forward with paying for its \$20 million share of the \$47 million Greensboro Elementary School replacement, \$2 million in renovations to the Caroline County Detention Center in Denton and \$750,000 for resurfacing county roads with hot mix asphalt. The remaining \$250,000 will cover the cost to issue the bonds.

Milton Nagel, assistant superintendent for administrative services for Caroline County Public Schools, said the much-needed replacement school in Greensboro will be the first new school the county has built in more than 40 years.

Renovating the existing "open space" building to convert it to a school with traditional hallways and classrooms with lockable doors — an important safety feature — and building an addition to address overcrowding would be more expensive than building a new two-story school, Nagel said.

The new school will also be more efficient and occupy a smaller footprint, on land adjacent to the current school the school system already owns.

Once the new school is built and open for the 2021-22 school year, the old school will be razed.

Groundbreaking is expected to happen later this fall, Nagel said.

Nagel thanked the commissioners for making the unpopular decision to raise the income tax rate in October 2017 to both generate more revenue to pay for the county's share of the project, and to make the county eligible for the maximum state contribution.

"Thank you for making the difficult decision to allow this to happen," said Dawn Swann, principal of Greensboro Elementary School.

Swann said she has worked at the school for 25 years, and remembers when she started, there were about 600 students and a few empty classrooms.

Now, there are 841 students enrolled, many of whom are in mobile classrooms in trailers set up behind the school.

"You've all visited my school multiple times," Swann said of the commissioners, "and you've seen the teachers teaching in a closet."

Superintendent Dr. Patricia Saelens said the new school will not only fit capacity needs, it will also allow for an instructional program to meet the needs of all students.

"Thank you for your continued support," Saelens said.

Caroline County Board of Education member Tolbert Rowe also added his thanks, on behalf of the board.

Caroline County Sheriff Randy Bounds thanked the commissioners for the new sheriff's office, currently under construction on Double Hills Road, and for including in the bond bill money to renovate its old home, the basement of the detention center, once the sheriff's office moves out.

Bounds said creating a central booking area in the detention center will be a huge benefit not only for the sheriff's deputies, but for all law enforcement agencies that make an arrest in the county.

A central booking area to take in arrestees will mean the arresting officer can go back on patrol, rather than having to sit with the suspect for hours, waiting to make an appearance before the district court commissioner, Bounds said.

Warden Charles Scott said the main building, built in 1906, and the two wings, built in 1982 and 1996, also need safety improvements.

Scott said the detention center needs an infirmary and a “safe cell” to hold inmates who might hurt themselves, and more space for programs meant to rehabilitate inmates and prepare them to successfully return to society.

“Thank you for your consideration,” Scott said.

Commission President Larry Porter said it was nice to hear “thank you” from so many people, but public safety and education are two things the commissioners cannot put a price on.

“We appreciate the gratitude, but this is kinda what we’re supposed to do,” Porter said.

A second public hearing, on a bill that will allow the commissioners to refund an existing lease-purchase agreement on emergency radio equipment at a substantial savings to the county, did not garner any comment.

That bill will also be up for potential enactment at the Sept. 10 meeting.

A third public hearing, for an agreement with Oldtown Materials for county road improvements it will make when it begins running a new sand, gravel and mineral extraction operation on Bridgetown Road, only received comment in support, from two lawyers representing the owner.

The commissioners signed that agreement following the public hearing.