

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD
OF ROWAN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
ADJOURNED MEETING
APRIL 8, 1989

The Board of Rowan County Commissioners met in Adjourned Session in the Community Building on April 8, 1989 at 9:00 a.m.

PRESENT: J. Newton Cohen, Sr., Chairman
Wilborn S. Swaim, Vice-Chairman
Henry H. Palmer, Member
George C. Knox, Member
Jamima P. DeMarcus, Member

The County Manager and County Attorney were also present as well as the City of Salisbury School Board and the Rowan County School Board and their respective staffs.

Chairman Cohen called the meeting to order and Commissioner Knox gave the invocation.

Chairman Cohen informed all those in attendance that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss possible litigation issues on the merger plan as well as the legality of funding a merged system on July 1, 1989.

Commissioner Palmer moved that the Board enter Executive Session for the purposes stated by the Chairman and seconded by Commissioner Knox. Motion was passed unanimously. The Chairman requested that the two (2) School Boards remain in Executive Session.

Commissioner Palmer moved that the Board go back into open session with Commissioner Swaim seconding the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

Chairman Cohen stated to those attending that the three (3) Boards have reviewed a number of options available to them. In their discussion, Dr. Donald Martin, the new Superintendent, had suggested his interest to get involved in the merger process. Chairman Cohen then suggested Dr. Martin to restate his proposal to those in attendance.

Dr. Martin then stated that last Wednesday he received a call from Mrs. Margaret Tucker in the County Office to bring him up to date on what the County Commissioners had done on Monday. After thinking about what was read to him by Mrs. Tucker from the "Salisbury Post" he then called Mr. Cohen late Thursday afternoon and asked if it would be appropriate for him to speak at this

meeting, and Mr. Cohen agreed.

Although Dr. Martin admitted to having some hesitancy in speaking about merger since he has not lived the history the other members have, he did have an outsider's perspective and realizes that the issue is a "double-edged sword" as it can be advantageous yet it has its limitations. He did not attempt to summarize the events that brought these three (3) boards together nor did he attempt to comment on the legal entanglements presented by the prospects of not merging. However, he did feel it to be important to remind them that the merger effort of all in attendance today has been for one single purpose and this is to enhance educational opportunities for students regardless where they live in Rowan County.

Dr. Martin went on to say that during the past three (3) months, he has learned a great deal about both school systems. He has observed the redistricting efforts and quickly recognizes that there is not an obvious "best plan". He, too, has been frustrated by the difficulties presented by "old data" and the sheer magnitude of the possibilities. Last October, he discussed redistricting with the Search Committee the night before he was employed. At that time, it was apparent that Board members were willing to accept the redistricting responsibilities in an effort to insulate him from the public's unhappiness that was likely to result. He was very appreciative to have not been made a part of this public unhappiness, but for the past week and a half, he has thought a lot about the prospect of merger not taking place. Before he returned to Kentucky last Friday, he observed the frustration of several central office personnel that have really been working on the "nuts and bolts" of bringing merger about. In conversations this morning with Commissioner DeMarcus, she mentioned several items of publications that are already out with the Rowan-Salisbury Schools listed on it--all the way from kindergarden registration materials to curriculum guidebooks for all five (5) high schools. He stated that he would be very pleased to serve as the superintendent of the Rowan County Schools if merger were to fail. He admitted, however, that he was very much looking forward to serving as a Superintendent of the new Rowan-Salisbury School System. After all the hours that had been invested by School Board members in the development of an acceptable redistricting plan, he felt it would be ludicrous for him to suggest that he could do any better right away. However, if both Boards do wish to continue merger efforts, he suggested two (2) activities that could take place, and discussed as follows:

- 1) To address the very issue of what happens if an acceptable plan simply cannot be agreed upon by June 30, 1989. What kind of safety net could exist or could there be one that would

have some kind of mediation or arbitration? He stated that there needs to be some type of safety net that would in a sense protect what the City perceives as dominant by a five/four board after the interim board takes place. Dr. Martin suggested appointing a study committee to investigate what a safety net could mean and to get at that in a very short period of time. They have had some general discussion that in a period of seven (7) days (by this time next Saturday) perhaps a committee that would include him, a City Board member, a County Board member, and the attorney of both Boards to determine what the safety net would mean and what are some provisions that could go into place on July 1, 1989 when merger would take place. If an acceptable redistricting plan had not been agreed upon then something would happen and that something would essentially protect the concerns of both Boards because they would both agree to the plan on the outset.

2) How can the plan be developed? What are some things that could be done in terms of a different procedure--a collection of data that might improve the possibility of arriving at a plan agreeable by both Boards. He then suggested six (6) things take place as follows:

1) That all building capacities be reviewed. The real issue there is looking at the number of full-size classrooms and the number of small spaces. Dr. Martin has visited 22 schools at this point and noted that there are classes being held in stairwells, closets, and yet there are other buildings that have empty classrooms. They need to determine what is the real capacity and what is a real instructional space. In regards to small spaces, there are roughly 100 special education classes in the combined Rowan-Salisbury school district. There are approximately 30 to 40 Chapter 1 kinds of remedial activities. There are computer labs, counseling offices, and gifted classes. They need to identify what are the small space requirements and what are the small spaces that exist. He suggested reviewing the capacity issue by identifying full-size classes in small classroom spaces.

2) To identify and determine the total actual number of small spaces that exist. He noted that there is space being utilized in a residence as well as the Nazereth Children's Home. He suggested identifying where all the small space areas are--is it Special Education classes or Chapter I spaces. By asking those people that are in charge of these programs would help to

identify and project into the future what the likely housing would be another suggestion. As an example, all countywide secondary trainable mentally handicapped students are presently housed at Knox Middle School. Dr. Martin had in hand a letter from a parent who is requesting that secondary trainable mentally handicapped students be placed in a secondary school environment. It is the federal intent of the law to have the least restrictive environment as well as education among peers. This was noted as being one example of a small space that will impact high school capacities which also needs to be reviewed.

- 3) To collect all of the Department of Public Instruction documents that evaluate the life expectancy of buildings. There are several of those kinds of facility surveys that are available. Dr. Martin proposed looking at those being a little more formal by actually asking a Department of Public Instruction person to spend some time here. In addition to that, he also suggested getting an architect, an engineer, and Board members from each of the Boards to look at the buildings by looking at life expectancy of that building housing educational activities in the 21st century--is it renovative, is it sizeable? He felt a group needs to look at this issue as well as look at the Department of Public Instruction's recommendations in order to reach some kind of consensus.
- 4) To review all the planning and zoning documents that exist. At this time, this will only pertain to the City since the County is not currently involved in countywide planning and zoning. Dr. Martin suggested looking at what is available, looking at sewer and water availability and ask the professional planners that are available in the County where they would project new subdivision growth to be.
- 5) To complete and reanalyze enrollment projects using a very standardized method, which the Department of Public Instruction uses. This book does in fact have the enrollment projections for the two (2) school districts for the next five (5) years and that projection is roughly 500 student growth (twenty classrooms). If you take the date they started with, it can be projected again for five (5) years because of birth records and that is where you generate kindergarden five (5) years ahead but you can actually take the upper grades, use the same retention ratios which also takes into account

the drop-out rate as it is for the average number of years that is calculated (usually it is four). From a four to five year period, it is actually accommodating and incorporating drop-out rates in those figures. So the retention ratios that are used could project the high school enrollment up in 1998. That particular information would be very helpful to address this issue of how many high schools are needed in this County? That has been discussed a lot and feels that issue could almost be put to rest indefinitely in terms of total capacity and total enrollment and concentrate on the small space requirements for the secondary level.

- 6) To form a small administrative committee with no offense towards school board members who have spent countless hours with maps. This group would look at all this new information and attempt to draw another set of district lines so the outcome of these six (6) efforts would be to come up with another redistricting plan. How long will it take to do this? There are only seventy (70) days left in the fiscal year. He felt anything can be done if you put enough time and energy toward doing it. Dr. Martin felt that with some cooperation that this can be done. Another important issue is citizen participation. There has been a lot of citizen interest in this process in the last three (3) months as well as a lot of interest generated on the entire procedure. He strongly felt that each of the six (6) steps mentioned would have the possibility that wherever a committee is involved, citizen participation would be important. How would you get citizen participation? Although there are many ways, one possible way would be to invite via the newspaper and/or public meeting people who would be interested in serving on a committee and had time to devote to this. All those people that are interested could be randomly selected so that a "no special interest" kind of representation of community people would serve. If this is not acceptable, then both Boards could appoint citizen representation. In reference to Linda Bailey's recent article in the Salisbury Post in regards to Wilson County, their Phase II plan consists of a 52-citizen committee. Although he felt that was a rather large committee, some type of representation as a community in this process to participate in these committees would be desirable.

Dr. Martin does not anticipate any additional cost other than buying a few working lunches and dinners. He also commented that

the map drawing should be contracted out. The visual aids could be done elsewhere as a legitimate contract expense.

Chairman Cohen stated that it appears to be the consensus of the two (2) school boards that they accept Dr. Martin's proposal to enter into this and try to work out a solution that is fair and equitable to both Boards. He stated that they can agree that one school board member and the attorney from each school board would be on this committee with Dr. Martin and that Mac Blankenship, County Attorney will be available if needed. This committee will set some guidelines between now and next Saturday in which the Commission will then have a Public Meeting where they will discuss these guidelines at 9:00 a.m. Although the Public will be invited at this meeting, it will not be a Public Hearing.

Chairman Cohen stated that the two (2) school boards did agree that there would be merger on July 1, 1989. Chairman Leonard stated that the City Board agreed only with the provision that an acceptable safety net be created. The County Commission's position at this time, with a letter in hand from the Attorney General, is that if they uphold the law of the State of North Carolina, they will anticipate merger on July 1, 1989. Chairman Cohen stressed that if it is a legal issue for the City to expedite any action, he would hope they would work quickly so that come budget time, they will not be left not knowing what they are doing and how many systems they will be funding because the Commission is assuming they will be funding a merged school system.

Commissioner Knox stated that this year Rowan County has developed a theme, "Pride in Rowan", which includes the school system and the government. "Pride in Rowan" is an anti-litter campaign. He stated that they are very grateful that the two (2) superintendents in place at the present time have cooperated so well. Their goal is to change the attitudes of people, which is the reason Commissioner Knox feels merger is very important.

With no further business, Chairman Cohen declared the meeting adjourned until Saturday, April 15, 1989 at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy S. Powell
Clerk to the Board