

MINUTES
CALLED MEETING
SEPTEMBER 10, 2020

A special called meeting of the Council for the City of Covington was held jointly with the Covington City School Board at 6:30 p.m. in Curfman Hall Auditorium in Covington High School located on Lexington Avenue, Covington, Virginia.

All members of Council were present as follows: Mayor Thomas H. Sibold, Jr., Vice Mayor David S. Crosier, Councilman Edmond J. "Eddie Joe" Entsminger, Councilman Raymond C. Hunter and Councilman S. Allan Tucker.
City Manager: Krystal Onaitis
City Attorney: Mark Popovich

The meeting was called to order by Covington School Board Chairman Tamala Preston with the following members present: Chairman Preston, Vice Chairman Bert Baker, Jonathan Arritt, Erika Hunter and Tonya Jones.
Covington School Superintendent Melinda Snead-Johnson

The purpose of the meeting was: (1) Public Hearing held by the Covington City School Board regarding the proposed merger of the Covington City School System and the Alleghany County School System; (2) Consideration of adoption of Resolution R-20-33 to consolidate the City of Covington School System and the Alleghany County School System.

School Board Chairman Preston opened the Public Hearing.

There were approximately twenty-five speakers and five letters read during the Public Hearing. Approximately seventeen of the speakers and three of the letters written were opposed to the merger of the school systems. Issues discussed included: past failure of consolidation of governments due to inability to reach agreements; transportation; quality of education with smaller class size; dedication of Covington's teachers; noted a poll taken with 93% of the educators opposed to the merger; funding recently cut by the State of Virginia for this merger and overall funding cuts to education; parent's concerns with larger classrooms and many other issues.

The speakers and letters in favor of the merger included issues such as: more opportunities for students; a need for vision for the future; financial concerns and the need for the community to come together.

The speakers were passionate about this issue and all wanted what was best for the students in both the Covington City School System and the Alleghany County School System.

The Public Hearing was closed.

A five minute recess was called.

Following the recess, Chairman Preston called the meeting to order and read the Resolution of Authorization for Consolidation of Covington City Public Schools and Alleghany County Public Schools – Code of Virginia Sec. 22.1-79(8).

Following the motion to authorize the merger of the Covington City School System and the Alleghany County School System, comments were heard from the members of the Covington School Board.

Erika Hunter expressed her opposition to the merger stating that she is concerned about the children, staff and parents noting that this is a life changing situation. She expressed concerns that this issue and action is all about the money and that there are too many unanswered questions.

Bert Baker expressed his opposition to the merger stating that this issue was not initiated by the Covington City Schools. He noted the success stories of the Covington Schools and the need for

choices. Students should be the top priority and the size of our schools allows teachers and staff to better connect with the students.

Tamala Preston spoke in favor of the merger while expressing appreciation for the outstanding group of teachers and their passion for the students. She stated that she is looking at the big picture with more opportunities for students, combining resources and that we are better and stronger together.

At this time, a roll call vote of the Covington School Board was held as follows:

Mr. Arritt – Yes

Mrs. Hunter – No

Ms. Jones read the Conflict of Interest section regarding her legal ability to vote on this issue as she is employed by the Alleghany County School Board and is a member of the Covington City School Board. Ms. Jones stated that she had determined that she could vote on this issue and her vote was Yes.

Mr. Baker – No

Mrs. Preston – Yes

The vote of 3 to 2 carried and the consolidation/merger was approved.

Following the vote by the Covington City School Board, Covington City Council prepared to address the consolidation of the Covington City Schools and the Alleghany County Schools.

Vice Mayor David Crosier read the Resolution Authorizing the Consolidation of Alleghany County and City of Covington School Districts.

A motion was made by Vice Mayor Crosier, seconded by Mr. Hunter, to approve Resolution R-20-33 Authorizing the Consolidation of Alleghany County and City of Covington School Districts.

Following the motion, comments were heard from members of Council.

Mr. Entsminger noted that he works with EMS and is responsible for the care of those in need. He stated that sitting in his chair on this night, was one of the most difficult decisions he has had to make. He felt that the plan presented is not the best plan and expressed his opposition to the consolidation.

Mr. Tucker stated his opposition to the consolidation of the Covington School System and Alleghany School System. He noted that there are many unanswered questions. Mr. Tucker taught in the Covington City Schools and knows the teachers and the positive aspects of the City Schools.

Mayor Sibold noted that he is a member of the Joint Committee and has been through this lengthy process.

Vice Mayor Crosier praised Mr. Entsminger for his courage in his comments. He stated that he is not in favor of the plan presented and that it needs a lot of work before it is presented to the State Board of Education.

At this time a roll call vote of Council was held as follows:

Mayor Sibold – For

Vice Mayor Crosier – For

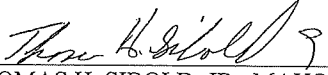
Mr. Entsminger – Against

Mr. Hunter – For

Mr. Tucker – Against

The vote of 3 to 2 carried and the consolidation/merger of the Covington City Schools and the Alleghany County Schools was approved.

No further business to come before Council, the meeting was adjourned.



THOMAS H. SIBOLD, JR., MAYOR

ATTEST:



EDITH S. WOOD, CITY CLERK