

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Commissioners Agree to Work with Board of Education on Funding Issues Limited Capital Allocation until RISE Plan is Completed

On November 26, 2018 The Board of Commissioners for Garrett County (BOCC) held a joint meeting with the elected members of the Garrett County Board of Education (BOE). The Commissioners requested an update on the BOE strategic plan and capital project request.

Strategic Plan

Over 18 months ago, in May 2017, the BOCC requested that the BOE develop a strategic plan to guide the priorities for the operating and capital budgets of the Garrett County Public School system. It was reported that two committees were formed, and work began on what became known as the RISE (Reforming, Innovating, and Strengthening for Excellence) Plan.

Work on the RISE strategic plan has been progressing, with the BOE most recently voting to hire a consultant to collect data and make recommendations specific to the Garrett school system. No timeline has been given for a potential consultant to make a recommendation.

The BOCC is concerned that the BOE has publicly presented options of consolidating several schools or realigning grade bands while also requesting significant funding for capital improvements for these same schools. Funding design and/or engineering can be a significant expense for a school that may not be part of a long-term plan.

The school board is an elected board and the BOCC has no role in creating the plan but, rather, approving funding distributions based on the data and planning provided by the BOE.

When asked about community schools, the BOCC stated that they are committed to community schools but also asked “what is a community school”? The BOCC is committed to keeping schools open as long as they are viable; however, they stated that if enrollment continues to drop, all options must be considered.

Capital Projects

The BOE requested funding of \$1,897,450 in Fiscal Year 2020 for capital projects. The BOCC approved two projects; a fire alarm replacement at Southern High for \$215,000 and design of front exterior renovations at Southern High for \$38,000.

The position of the BOCC is that no additional capital allocation or commitment can be made until the results of the RISE plan are completed and a detailed and long-term recommendation is made for the BOE facilities.

While the BOCC agreed that they are willing to go to the bond market and are even willing to raise taxes, it has to be according to a long-term strategy and they haven't seen that plan from the BOE. The BOCC stated in the meeting that they "can't sign a blank check for capital improvement. We need to know what to expect in years 6, 7 and 8."

The BOCC provides over half of the BOE's funding, which is over one-third of the entire Garrett County budget. The BOCC has no input in the use of these funds, except for approval of capital projects.

Currently, Garrett County's funding allocation is 50% from the state and 50% local government. However, in some cases, the local obligation becomes closer to 75% because some parts of the capital projects (notably architecture and design work, as well as furniture and fixtures) are not funded by the state.

Members of both Board's agreed to continue to meet and work together to find solutions to school facility issues.

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About Garrett County Government: The County is governed by an elected Board of County Commissioners (the "Board"), whose three members serve four-year terms and must live in the District which they represent. The Board may exercise only such powers as are conferred by the General Assembly of Maryland. The County is administered under a line organizational method, with the County Administrator responsible for the general administration of County Government. The administration of the County is centralized with the County Administrator responsible for overseeing the financial planning, annual budget process, personnel management, and direction and management of operations within the organization.