



Marie G. Davis Middle is off South Tryon. Inset is of the 1954 gym that under one renovation option might be refurbished rather than replaced.

Bond review slips into the subjective

Citizen panel backs projects in wealthy neighborhoods, is poised to back closure of 2 schools serving low-income families

The citizens panel reviewing where bond money should be spent veered into school board territory Wednesday as it considered solutions dealing not with bonds but student assignment, and agreed to consider recommending closing schools.

Even as it was approving proceeding with most projects already under way or promised to voters, it agreed to consider recommending closing Berryhill Elementary in west Mecklenburg and Marie G. Davis Middle off South Tryon Street. Both schools serve low-income communities. Marie G. Davis and York Road, built as a segregated black high school, have shared a campus since the early 1950s.

The committee has been spurred to consider options beyond its charge by north Mecklenburg resident and FUME member Norm Gundel. Among committee members Wednesday, Gundel appeared most focused on transferring the maximum number of renovation dollars to the new schools that will relieve suburban overcrowding.

Wednesday's decisions brought to \$26.6 million the amount to be redirected by halting design work, cutting the scope of projects, delaying others. Building the top-priority suburban schools would cost around \$80 million.

Kids hear plea that they be 'leaders we are looking for'

A heroine of the civil rights movement spent Tuesday at a high school she could not have attended as a student, speaking to students about the fall of 1957 when angry Charlotte crowds at another high school first tried intimidation but ultimately turned to violence to roust her from her neighborhood school.

Dorothy Counts Scoggins appealed to her student audiences at Myers Park High School to commit themselves to creating a diverse society and being "the leaders that we are looking for.. that we don't have now."



Scoggins

And Scoggins said she wished CMS "would adopt something across the whole system that would develop leadership" for a diverse society and nurture programs at all schools to give students opportunities to work on diversity issues.

"We need leaders who think globally and think outside the box... and look at everybody as an individual."

Speaking in a way that event co-organizer Lauren Bollinger said "touched every student in the room," Scoggins went day by day through the two weeks

Continued on Page 6

Design work to end:	\$5,270,000
(No money available to build)	
Alexander Middle	\$700,000
Alex. Graham Mid.	\$1,100,000
Cochrane Middle	\$270,000
Garinger High	\$650,000
Long Creek Elem.	\$900,000
North Meck High	\$650,000
Sedgefield Middle	\$1,000,000
Downsized projects	\$8,151,428
Marie G. Davis Mid.	\$5,351,428
Randolph Middle	\$2,800,000
Visits ahead	\$13,200,000
Berryhill Elem.	\$8,900,000
Albemarle Rd. Elem.	\$4,300,000
Reedy Creek Elem.	not final
Tot'l. redirectable:	\$26,621,428

Members of the Bond Oversight Committee are visibly uncomfortable in their new role imposed by the school board in March. Created to reassure voters that bond dollars were being spent as promised during bond referendums, the body now is

See Page 2

Bond Oversight weighs its options

Continued from Page 1

weighing which promises CMS should keep, which it should break.

Closing Berryhill west of the airport could move about 240 students from the 1978 school to newer empty seats at Westerly Hills and Reid Park, both east of the airport. Renovating Berryhill will be held up for five or more years pending extension of the sewer service required to meet current building codes.

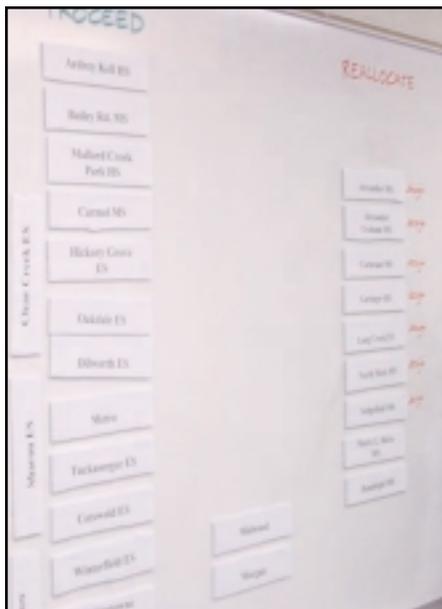
Gundel suggested closing Marie G. Davis and using the renovation project money to build full-size 1,200-seat schools at Sedgefield Middle and Spaugh Middle. Sedgefield is about 1.5 miles from Davis. Spaugh is about 4.3 miles. As the committee discussed the proposal Wednesday, none of the money would relieve suburban crowding.

Gundel's suggestion would make two 52-classroom middle schools instead of three 36-classroom schools. The two would be full, and would serve huge concentrations of low-performing, high needs students.

Wednesday was a crazy day at Marie G. Davis, some teachers reported. Attention spans were shorter than on Monday. Maybe it was the weather; or the hormones. Such is life in a middle school.

Principal Terry Cline sat on his stool in the office as dismissal time neared, deftly handling a stream of individual student issues, from a burned arm to several discipline cases to a student presenting evidence of homework accomplished in all classes.

Calling all students by name, Cline moved easily from hugs to playful pushing to stern warnings, as appropriate. Amid the hubbub and volume of traffic, it was hard for an infrequent visitor to imagine how a facility with 1,200 such young people would operate, except via permanent



As Bond Oversight Committee members reached consensus Wednesday, school projects took their place in categories such as "proceed" and "reallocate." Recommendations from the committee, and possibly different ones from Supt. Jim Pughsley, go to the school board for its May 11 meeting.

lockdown.

"This is not a decision I think we should make," Gundel told the committee Wednesday morning. "I want to offer this option to the Board of Education. Let them make it."

Chamberlain said that he would close Davis if he were in the commercial real estate business. "But this was York Road High School

in a day gone by," he noted. "And there is a community here that has an expectation that finally we are going to bring their school up to standards."

"I think it's a good idea for someone else to decide," said committee member Chip Boorman. "Let them fight over it."

The committee earlier agreed to visit any school where it might recommend altering the project promised to voters. The committee will be on tour Monday morning. It will see Steele Creek just to get a feel for an overcrowded older school, then travel to only three schools: Berryhill, Reedy Creek and Albemarle Road, all elementaries.

As one wag put it Wednesday afternoon, "Somebody who gives a ... about the children [at those three schools] needs to meet those people when they get off the bus and tell them not to mess with their school."

That short list should be a relief to more than a dozen sets of PTAs, principals, teaching staffs and student bodies.

Asked whether the renovation projects are of higher priority than the new schools, Chamberlain gamely replied, "It's in the eye of the beholder."

As for how facilities affect students in their day-to-day school life, Chamberlain advised looking at a new but crowded Bradley Middle and a underenrolled but

Continued on Page 3

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Bond Oversight weighs its options

Continued from Page 2

ramshackle Sedgefield Middle.

“The challenges are different. The circumstances equally challenge those kids. I don’t want to be the arbiter of which is more challenged.... I don’t know whether there’s any quantitative way to evaluate that.”

Asked when facility overcrowding warrants action, Chamberlain said it was when 15% or more of the total enrollment was housed in mobiles. That figure at some CMS schools is now nearing 100%.

The \$330 million in bond-funded uncompleted renovation projects fall into a variety of categories. A rundown:

Proceeding with COPs

County commissioners have recently approved use of nonvoted bonds or certificates of participation for three schools: the Bailey Road Middle School in Davidson to replace Davidson IB and relieve overcrowded Butler; the new high school at Mallard Creek Park in the northeast, and the new high school near the S.C. line on Audrey Kell Road.

Too far under way to stop

Carmel Middle.

Hickory Grove Elementary has already gone out to contractors, and has gained \$1.5 million from the county for a joint-use Park & Rec project.

Oakdale Elementary is already preparing to swing to old Druid Hills over the summer during extensive renovation of its northwest campus off Brookshire Boulevard.

Dilworth Elementary is another joint-use project that has \$1.5 million of county money behind it.

Metro Schools downtown has been half demolished and bids for rebuilding were approved by the school board last week.

Tuckasegee Elementary will be bid in mid-May.

Cotswold depends on “a fleeting

If you build it...

The Bond Oversight Committee faced these choices at Sharon, a 1977 elementary built with big classrooms and few hallways. Today the “open” education program it was designed to deliver is out of favor. Children exiting one classroom may have to walk through another. The choices:

(1) Do the \$8.4 million project as designed (top), building hallways, reducing the number of classrooms in the main building (right), and replacing them in a new classroom wing (upper left) to form an 800-seat school.

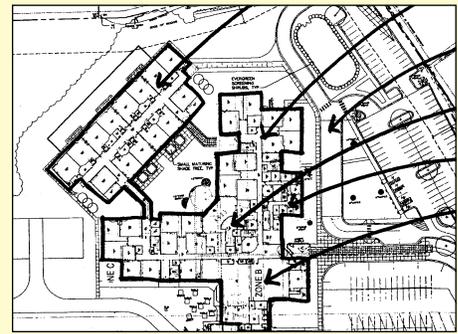
(2) Save about \$1 million by building only half the new classroom wing, leaving the school at roughly current size.

(3) Scratch the new wing (lower design), and don’t mess with the “open” classrooms, doing only critical renovation work and expanding the cafeteria. Savings: about \$5 million.

(4) Fix the “open” classrooms without adding the new classroom wing – leaving the school undersized and overcrowded.

The committee chose (1) for these reasons, all of them somewhat subjective: Building Services chief Guy Chamberlain worries that noise standards that may within a decade become part of the building code may put such “open classroom” facilities out of compliance; Chamberlain says that while the current principal seems to like the facility the way it is, the next principal may not; the \$1 million for the full addition makes the cost per seat of the full addition very attractive, and thus a good buy; and members of the committee believe that an upgraded Sharon near SouthPark mall will draw more students from nearby private schools than CMS is now projecting.

The decision to proceed at Sharon, in a wealthy part of the city, stands in sharp contrast to possible closures or work cutbacks at Albemarle Road, Marie G. Davis and Berryhill – all Equity Plus schools serving low-income neighborhoods.



swing opportunity” at Selwyn – a reference to how some projects are timed to move teachers and students to a nearby older facilities that will eventually be demolished.

Winterfield is preparing to swing to old Windsor Park nearby.

Huntingtowne Farms is a project, Chamberlain said without further comment, that “warranted having the work performed.” The statement was not challenged.

Shelving the designs

In 2002, commissioners agreed

to a bond issue, but demanded that it be downsized. In reply, the schools sought money to design some projects, expecting to come back the next year for construction money. No new bond issues were authorized, and staff worries that design work will become outdated by the time construction money becomes available. Design and construction costs for a given school project are normally combined in a single bond issue.

The decision to shelve design projects saves about \$5.3 million

Continued on Page 4

Bond Oversight weighs its options

Continued from Page 3

and affects Long Creek Elementary; Alexander, Alexander Graham, Cochrane and Sedgefield Middles; and Garinger and North Meck Highs.

Alexander Graham had some additional bond money to replace a window wall. That work has been completed.

Shelving the project

Renovation of Berryhill to a 800-seat elementary would cost nearly twice as much per student as the costly seats at high schools. With sewer service years away, Chamberlain did not cost out smaller-school options at Berryhill.

At Albemarle Road Elementary, the school is close to meeting current standards, but a \$4.3 million renovation and expansion would address current overcrowding.

The committee may suggest that the board consider dealing with the overcrowding by moving assignment boundaries, to send students to empty seats at nearby elementaries.

"I know our charter is not to get into student assignment, but there are other options," Chamberlain said.

And the building is "certainly closer to baseline than 50 other schools that are not even on the radar."

At Marie G. Davis, if the school is not closed, the committee considered two ways to reduce the current \$19.9 million, 1,200-seat facility where about 450 students are now served.

Option 1 would build core spaces for a 1,200-seat school but save about \$5 million but dropping a classroom wing and renovating the existing gym.

A second option would build a new gym, but drop the third floor from one classroom wing.

Committee members suggested option two along with reusing the existing gym, possibly bringing total savings to \$7 million.

Chamberlain said he would cost out that suggestion, but said to the committee, "I'm not sure your mission was to redesign buildings."

Other options

Midwood, scheduled for renovations, serves two alternative programs: Teen Age Parent Services, and Midwood High for students who don't thrive in comprehensive high schools.

And Morgan, a small building near uptown, will be expensive to renovate as an historic site. Morgan's alternative program for special ed students has been moved to leased space because of the building's condition.

Chamberlain told the committee the administration was already examining other options that would move those programs from those sites. Possibly because of pending site negotiations, he declined further comment.

The \$10.2 million committed to renovation of those two buildings has not been counted in the committee's redirected funds.

No connection was made during the meeting between the earlier discussion of relocating Marie G. Davis students, and the future of the high school programs at Midwood and the middle school program at Morgan.

Cleared for takeoff

At an earlier meeting, the Bond Oversight Committee had asked for additional information on a number of projects. After discussion, the consensus was that all should proceed.

Clear Creek Elementary, with a capacity of 660 and enrollment around 502, is scheduled for an \$8.5 million renovation and expansion. The questions had to do with utilities and the time it would take to build.

Utility connections have now been promised in time for the construction to proceed on schedule.

The project will take awhile because the school will remain in session during renovation. But much of the delay, Chamberlain said, was because of the time it is taking to get permits from

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Building Standards.

"Everybody in Mecklenburg County is being treated equally as bad," Chamberlain said. A small flaw in documents requires resubmitting the documents, and the resubmitted documents go back to the end of the waiting line.

"And the second time they will find things they didn't find the first time," he quipped.

At **Northeast Middle**, the committee approved a three-year, on-site \$14.2 million renovation and addition, despite the school being under capacity and little enrollment growth projected.

Chamberlain said he would not recommend reducing the size of the project. "Any decision to defer and reallocate is going to have to be your decision."

A 10-classroom addition was completed in 1981. The only other work done at the 1976 school occurred on an emergency basis when fireproofing started peeling off.

The committee agreed to proceed with the project. The only question raised was how the school ever got to be named Northeast.

At **Quail Hollow**, an 1,100-capacity school now has 1,130 students and may have 1,400 in a few years.

"I don't know how you would proceed with Northeast and not with this," said committee member Ray Ardizzone. "This has a physical need but it also has a capacity need," Chamberlain agreed.

At **Randolph Middle**, the original project was for a 1,200-seat school. The building houses 700 students in three magnet programs, and hosts a large program for orthopedically handicapped students.

The committee approved a revised project downsizing the space to 924 students, but addressing access problems, including elevators from the classroom level to the gym. During construction, the school will be relocated to Hawthorne, after

Continued on Page 5

Bond Oversight weighs its options

Continued from Page 4

Piedmont leaves. Downsizing will save \$2.8 million of the originally projected \$14.9 million.

"The merits of the project are strong enough to keep it going," Chamberlain advised. But for Ardizzone, the subjective judgment calls were troubling.

"I suggest we switch places with the Board [of Education] and let them do this for three or four years," he said.

At **Reedy Creek**, the committee postponed a decision and will visit the northeast Mecklenburg campus, which was opened in 1981 and saw an addition in 1991. Its capacity is about 660, its enrollment is about 600, and the forecast is for 900 in five years.

But the school site just west of a new portion of I-485 is surrounded by residentially zoned land. Why build an 800-student school when you're already expecting 900, Chamberlain was asked. Answer: CMS doesn't build for more than 800. That leaves two dozen or more mobile units on playfields at some suburban schools.

The site visit is to answer Gundel's questions about why a comparatively new school is scheduled for an \$8.6 million renovation.

New parking lots and access

roads on the site have already been approved by the school board.

Earlier questions about access to sewer service have not been satisfactorily answered: A planned Charlotte annexation in 2005 will require sewer service to the site by June 30, 2007, in time for CMS's renovation project.

At **Sharon Elementary**, the committee considered four options (box, Page 3).

As the committee adjourned after three hours of discussion, the final "proceed" list included Audrey Kell High, Bailey Road Middle, Mallard Creek Park High, Carmel, Hickory Grove, Oakdale, Dilworth, Metro, Tuckaseegee, Cotswold,

Winterfield, Huntingtowne Farms, Northeast Middle, Quail Hollow, Sharon and Clear Creek.

Design work had been scrubbed at Alexander Middle, Cochrane Middle, Garinger High, Long Creek Elementary, North Meck High and Sedgefield Middle.

Projects had been reduced or shelved at Berryhill, Albemarle Road Middle, Marie G. Davis, Randolph Middle and Reedy Creek Elementary.

Midwood and Morgan were in limbo pending real estate talks.

The committee reconvenes at Building Services Monday at 7:30 a.m. for a van ride to Steele Creek, Berryhill, Albemarle Road and Reedy Creek.

Calendar

APRIL

30-1 "Reauthorization and Reform: A Conference about the Education of Students with Disabilities," Friday Center, Chapel Hill, free. For information and form: Renee Palmer at 919-856-2195, snf@mindspring.com

MAY

11 Board of Education presents its budget request to Board of County Commissioners, 3 p.m., Government Center Room 267.

13 League of Women Voters on No Child Left Behind's impact; speaker is John Poteat from N.C. Public Schools Forum; 7 p.m., First Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall, 200 W. Trade St. Information: Malyn Pratt, 704-333-2037 or malyn@carolina.rr.com.

19 Chamber Education Lobbying Trip to Raleigh to visit with members of the N.C. General Assembly about public education needs, 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Day includes lunch with delegation and forum on taxing authority for school boards. To reserve seat on bus, call 704-378-1301 or e-mail kramer@charlottechamber.com

20 H.E.L.P. meeting, 7 p.m., First United Presbyterian Church, 406 N. College St.

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Counts Scoggins presses students to lead

Continued from Page 1

she was at Harding High. She recalled a phalanx of students egged on by adults that she had to pass the first day; the quiet on campus the following week when whites assumed she would not return; an administrator's blind eye as she faced harassment during class change; the shunning she received from teachers.

And of course she only wanted to go to her neighborhood school.

Old Harding High, located in what is now the Irwin Avenue Elementary School campus, was three blocks from the Counts home. West Charlotte High, where Dorothy was assigned, was about 2 miles away. When the family couldn't drive her to school, she would walk, and busloads of white children would pass her as she walked.

School leaders in 1957 had decided that desegregation would be done "quietly." Four black families were chosen to be assigned to white schools. She said she had been taught that integration "was the right thing to do" and that "I was just as good as anybody else. I had a right to a quality education.... People thought that I was inferior... but I was taught that I was not."

Giving the students another example of the key role that churches played in preparing and supporting the blacks who found themselves facing the white mobs opposed to desegregation, Scoggins noted that just before she learned that she had been accepted to Harding, she had

been out of town at a Presbyterian Church conference attended by students from across the globe. She returned to Charlotte strengthened for what turned out to be an ordeal.

"The most humiliating thing that has ever happened to me in my entire life was being spat upon," Scoggins said.

Speaking to students during their lunch break, Scoggins recalled the day she was in the Harding cafeteria eating alone and found herself surrounded by large male students, who proceeded to spit onto her food.

In days the situation turned violent, and the Counts family removed Dorothy, first to a school near Philadelphia, then to a boarding school.

Recalling the Harding days Tuesday, Scoggins said both she and other students were acting on what they had been taught. "I was taught to love. They were taught to hate." Whites were also "protecting their turf."

She said the experience convinced her, even at age 15, "that the rest of my life will be dedicated to making sure that what happened to me wouldn't happen to other children."

The key argument for diversity, she said, is that "we learn from each other." Her white friends "say things to me that I don't know" and she values that. That doesn't mean she has to give up who she is, she told the students. "I have my own culture and I'm not giving up that culture."

In answer to a question, Scoggins said local schools are

more divided now by socioeconomics than when she was a teen. And she predicted that neighborhood-based assignments would keep the schools that way.

"We're not ever going to have an integrated community... That's OK in some sense but let's make sure it is equitable across the whole system."

"When we build schools where do we put them? Yes, in the suburbs. And who lives in the suburbs? Whites, and those black kids who are fortunate enough to live in that community. Then what happens to blacks who live in the inner city? The system goes back to the way it was when I was in school and they get lesser opportunities."

Scoggins blamed resegregative decisions on politics and on parents from segregated northern communities "who want it to be the way it was. But that doesn't help all children."

A student who had been at Marie G. Davis when it was an International Baccalaureate magnet celebrated the decision that left the school's high-tech resources at Davis when the assignment plan moved the magnet and low-income children repopulated their neighborhood school.

Scoggins applauded the decision, but added, "I want every school in Mecklenburg County to have the same resources that Marie G. Davis had."

"Because it's in Myers Park this school has all these resources," she said. "Why can't all the schools across the system have the same resources?"

Briefly

Failing No Child: Chicago school officials predict that 82% of their schools will be listed as failing under No Child Left Behind, the Chicago Tribune reported. Although tens of thousands of students will be eligible to transfer, there are only about 20 schools with space to receive them. Last year 1,100 slots were available at 38 of the 600 schools in the district.

www.chicagotribune.com

Making amends: Rather than integrate in the 1950s, Prince Edward County, Va., shut down its schools from 1959-1964. Last week, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported, Gov. Mark Warner signed a bill into law for a \$2 million scholarship program for students affected by the shut-downs. "Virginia got it wrong, we got it incredibly wrong," Gov. Warner told a group.

www.ajc.com

Elementary dropouts: More than 100 million children between 6 and 11 in developing countries don't go to school and an additional 150 million will drop out in elementary school, the Los Angeles Times reported. About 60% of those children are girls.

www.latimes.com

SAT changes: Beginning next year, the SAT will have an essay component, The Philadelphia Inquirer reported. The College Board hopes to encourage teachers to teach writing. Other changes to the test include more reading comprehension, more advanced math and an analogy section.

www.philly.com

Just immigrants: Denver plans to open a school for immigrants this fall, the Rocky Mountain News reported. The school will have flexible hours and serve 16- to 21-year-old English language learners.



Robert Knisely

TEACHABLE MOMENT: On the order of twice as many people protested for and against abortion rights in Washington last weekend as attended the history-altering March on Washington in 1963 that led to civil rights legislation.

www.insidedenver.com

All on college track: A bill requiring all California high school students to take the minimum college entrance requirements was introduced last week, the Contra Costa Times told its readers. The requirements would be voluntary until 2010. After that, all students would be required to take college prep classes to graduate.

www.contracostatimes.com

Alternative financing: Texas Gov. Rick Perry wants to finance schools by giving property tax reductions to the rich and increasing "sin taxes," the New York Times reported. The taxes would include a \$1 increase on cigarettes and a \$5 tax each time a person enters a topless bar. He also proposed to expand legal gambling.

www.nytimes.com

Ignoring No Child: The percent of schools using research-based education programs has

declined, Education Week reported. A study found that schools using programs characterized as having evidence of positive effectiveness declined from 20.2% in 1998 to 8.1% in 2002, while those with weak, mixed or no research increased from 12.4% to 18.2%.

www.edweek.org

DidYaHear?

✓ There's talk that at one CMS school, where a third or more of the children are Hispanic and many students and parents are just learning English, the only paid staffer who knows both Spanish and English is the janitor, an erudite immigrant who pitches in to ease communication barriers. Mop that floor! Translate that sentence!

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