

## SCHOOL BOARD WORKSHOP

GADSDEN COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD  
MAX D. WALKER ADMINISTRATION BUILDING  
35 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BLVD.  
QUINCY, FLORIDA

February 12, 2024

4:00 P.M.

The workshop was open to the public and electronically recorded.

The following Board members were present: Mrs. Karema D. Dudley, Chairwoman, Mr. Leroy McMillan, Ms. Cathy S. Johnson, Mr. Steve Scott, and Mr. Charlie D. Frost. Also present were Mr. Elijah Key, Superintendent and Secretary to the Board; Mrs. Deborah Minnis, Attorney for the Board; and others.

1. Call To Order

The workshop was called to order by the Chairwoman, Mrs. Karema D. Dudley, at 4:02 p.m.

2. Opening Prayer

The opening prayer was led by Mr. Charlie D. Frost.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Recited in unison.

4. Discussion of New K-8 School Property

Mrs. Dudley recognized Mr. TJ Lewis, Economic Development Council; Mr. Steve Winn; Ms. Brenda Holt, County Commissioner; and Ms. Shawanna Moye, Boys & Girls Club.

Ms. Brenda Holt shared with the Board information regarding alternate site options for the New K-8 School. She stated that in June of 2023, the Gadsden County School District announced that it had secured \$70.9 million in funding for a new state-of-the-art K-8 school to replace aging buildings potentially consolidating the operations of Gadsden Elementary Magnet School, George Munroe Elementary School, Stewart Street Elementary School and James A. Shanks Middle School. The school district provides that its decision to invest in a new K-8 school is driven by a desire to create a modern environment that fosters creativity, collaboration and academic for students in Gadsden County.

She stated that the government of Gadsden County seeks to provide the Gadsden County School Board options in its efforts to modernize, consolidate and centralize operations for the benefit of K-8 academics in Gadsden County. The Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners shares the School Board's desire to boost quality of life for all County residents by leveraging strategic public investments by FDOT to projects such as the Quincy by-pass, by Gadsden County Government in projects such as the future Emergency Medical Services Facility, Emergency Operations and Dispatch Center, Public Works Facilities, and the Gadsden County Sheriff's Department; all working together to build a stronger community for tomorrow that retains and attracts residents and private investment.

She stated that Gadsden County staff has analyzed the site of the proposed new \$70 million K-8 school by the Gadsden County School Board, along with properties held by County Government and offers this Alternative Site Analysis report for the consideration by both the Board of County Commissioners and the Gadsden County School Board as these alternatives maximize the School Board's intent to create a modern environment for creativity, collaboration and academics, along with the broader public interest of leveraging public spending to benefit efforts to revitalize our community.

Ms. Holt stated that along with the alternative site study, Gadsden County explores the adaptation of the existing James A. Shanks Middle School site for public benefit as the existing facilities are well suited to fill current and future needs of Gadsden County residents. She stated that the Gadsden County School Board proposes to redevelop the current site of James A. Shanks Middle School into the consolidated campus for Gadsden Elementary Magnet School, George W. Munroe Elementary School, Stewart Street Elementary School and James A. Shanks Middle School sites. She stated that currently, records of the Gadsden County Property Appraiser indicate the James A. Shanks Middle School site is 30 acres, with a significant drop in topography from 280-ft to as low as 180-ft on the western 1/3 portion of the site. Surrounding land uses include a platted subdivision to the north, a 90-acre vacant parcel and single-family home to the west, an 11-acre apartment community, a privately-owned industrial warehouse, as well as the City of Quincy Community Center, football and baseball facilities to the south, along with single-family residential uses to the east. The property is accessed by SR-12 (King Street), North Cleveland Street, and Graves Street, all 2-lane undivided local roadways. A 2023 Level of Service (LOS) analysis along these roadways is currently unavailable, however, it is anticipated that peak demand along serving roadways will increase by 182% as this school site will grow to accommodate an estimated enrollment of 1,647 students (projection based on current enrollment figures) versus the 593 it currently serves.

She stated that this level of investment by the State of Florida into the Gadsden County School District, met with concerns from area residents that future capacity along the local roadways surrounding the James A. Shanks Middle School site may be inadequate to support future redevelopment plans, along with long-time resident's stated their desire to preserve the James A. Shanks Middle School site and facilities for future use, has inspired the Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners to pursue a search for alternative sites that match the School Board's stated objectives. These presented alternatives aim to not cause the Gadsden County School Board to incur additional land acquisition cost and to maintain its ability to utilize its current vision (design) for its future consolidated K-8 campus, while also providing adequate land to accommodate future growth while sparing the current James A. Shanks Middle School facilities for future purposes advantageous to the Gadsden County community.

Ms. Holt stated that Gadsden County has reviewed its inventory of County owned property as well as other publicly owned or available properties, and is recommending Alternative Site 3, a 63.07 acre +/- portion of a 93.62-acre site located at the southern terminus of 9<sup>th</sup> Street in Quincy for this site option analysis. The site is primarily accessed by Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd near other Gadsden County School campus facilities and is situated internal to a densely populated neighborhood, which provides enhanced connectivity/walkability to nearby residents/students.

She stated that in contrast, the James A. Shanks Middle School site, while located proximate to established neighborhoods, has limited available roadway capacity along the local roads that provide vehicular access. The redevelopment of the site which currently enrolls an estimated 593 students to one that may potentially service more than 2x as many will further strain serving streets during peak commute hours. The projected impact to serving roadways may result in the need to expand serving facilities to accommodate the proposed school consolidation at this location. It should be noted that this site measured at 30 acres, with substantial portions unavailable for development, presents limited opportunities for further expansion should the need arise in the future.

She stated that the alternate site is a prominent location within an established, densely populated neighborhood. It will serve as a visual testament to the County's dedication to progress and sustainable development, making a lasting impression on students, families and visitors and serving as a point of pride underscoring the importance of education and community engagement. Additionally, for prospective residents, the location makes an appealing factor with its natural scenic characteristics, the well-maintained character of the surrounding neighborhood, and room to expand the campus in the future.

Ms. Holt stated that the significant investment of \$71 million in new public facility, specifically an educational institution, within a small rural community like Gadsden County presents a remarkable opportunity to project progress and foster a positive identity to visitors, prospective residents and companies. Siting this school in the recommended location would also preserve and/or enhance the value of the Gadsden County School Board's current real estate holdings in the area and provide a boost to the surrounding neighborhoods. Further,

selecting this site brings this school facility closer to proposed future residential communities currently proposed for southern areas of Quincy, thereby maintaining this project site as future-ready. The presence of a well-funded, modern school will inspire confidence in the area's commitment to education and, by extension, the overall quality of life. The future K-8 school will provide a compelling reason for prospective residents to consider Gadsden County, fostering additional economic growth, property value enhancements and community vitality. She stated that there would be no cost to the School Board; the County Commissioners with Board approval will donate the land to the School Board. She stated that the County is working with the property owner who is looking to donate the property.

Board Members and the Superintendent shared their concerns, made comments and asked questions during the presentation of the alternate site options for the new K-8 school.

Mr. TJ Lewis stated that preserving James A. Shanks Middle School rather than tearing it down offers an exceptional opportunity for adaptive reuse of a much-beloved community landmark. By repurposing this historic structure, we can breathe new life into it and leverage its existing space for a variety of purposes beneficial to the Gadsden County community. He stated that James A. Shanks Middle School, with its architectural significance and central location, can become a cornerstone for community investment and job creation. It can be a place for residents to connect, learn, and engage in cultural and recreational activities. Furthermore, it can serve as a business incubation center, nurturing local entrepreneurship and job creation, which aligns perfectly with our vision for community growth. This repurposing approach also makes it a cost-effective option, as it minimizes the fiscal impact associated with demolition and new construction.

He stated in addition, James A. Shanks Middle School could be adapted into public administration facilities, offering a dedicated space for governmental services that fosters accessibility and efficiency. He stated that by keeping the school's campus intact, we preserve a piece of our community's history, promoting a sense of identity and belonging among long-time residents. Moreover, maintaining James A. Shanks Middle School provides facilities that are ready to accommodate future emergencies as well as economic development opportunities and positions our community for growth and expansion. This flexibility ensures that Gadsden County can quickly respond to and seize unforeseen community enhancement opportunities, ultimately attracting investment, creating jobs, and spurring local prosperity.

Mr. Lewis stated that the preservation of James A. Shanks Middle School is a wise investment in our community's future and aligns perfectly with your goal of fostering community growth and re-development, and the selection of an alternative site would allow Gadsden County to continue use of this campus for years to come.

Ms. Rutha Black, citizen, addressed the Board with concerns changing the site location. She stated that she was a former employee of Department of Education. She asked the Board to be careful and double check with DOE Department of Facilities before giving approval to change the site location to build the new K-8 school because it could mean losing funding. She stated that DOE's original approval was given to the Board based on the James A. Shanks Middle School site location. She thanked the Board for considering a new school.

Mrs. Dudley thanked Ms. Black for addressing the Board. She stated that she will make certain that the Board will not do anything to jeopardize its funding.

Mr. Scott stated that he shared some of the same concerns as Ms. Black. He stated that there has not been public input; DOE approved funding was based on the James A. Shanks Middle School site location; needed a guarantee in writing from the city, county and DOE; the State Legislature approved the funding based on the James A. Shanks Middle School location; and the Board has received nothing regarding the King Street Pool.

Mrs. Dudley stated that Mr. Scott has valid concerns. She stated that she is exploring the options as an opportunity. She stated that she has reservations. She stated that she wants to make the best decision and want everyone to be proud of the new school. Mr. Frost stated that this is the planning process. Ms. Johnson stated that stakeholders need to be involved in the planning process. She stated that everything need to be put in writing. The Board thanked Commissioner Holt and the Economic Development Council for addressing the Board.

5. Educational Items by the Superintendent

Mr. Key stated that DAG was asked to do a pro/cons analysis of both sites for the new school. He stated that DAG will provide that information on Thursday (February 15). He stated that plans for the new K-8 school were given to the Department of Education. He stated that \$750,000 has already been spent on the James A. Shanks Middle School location. He stated that Havana Magnet School and Gadsden County High School appeals have been submitted for a letter grade of "C". He stated that the Boys & Girls Club of the Big Bend Basketball Team lost in the district playoff. He stated that Crossroad Academy Basketball Team is in the district playoff.

6. School Board Requests and Concerns

In response to Mr. Scott's concern regarding information from the Property Appraisal's Office regarding the King Street Pool, Mr. Key stated that Mr. Nixon, City Manager, was waiting to get written information from the Appraisal's Office.

Mrs. Dudley stated that an employee, Ms. Tracy Adams, passed away. She stated that she worked at George Munroe Elementary School.

7. The workshop adjourned at 4:55 p.m.