**Seminary Hill Association, Inc.**

***Special Meeting -- School Issues in the City of Alexandria***

Wednesday, December 14, 2016

Virginia Theological Seminary

***Note: This is not a transcript of the meeting--no recording was made—this is a“gist” of the conversations noted by the recorder.***

President Nan Jennings opened the meeting shortly after 7:30 pm by welcoming all but especially the only two who were able to sit on the panel—School Board Member Cindy Anderson from District B and Bill Goff, Area Rep 2, from Seminary Hill Association, Inc. (SHA). Nan then gave her own background including her teaching experience and passed out a list of a dozen concerns including four specific ones that SHA Board members wanted addressed. Nan asked Cindy and Bill to introduce themselves and to give an opening statement.

Cindy noted in her introduction that she and two of her children graduated from T. C. Williams High School (TCW).

Bill introduced himself and discussed then commented on the construction of the TCW tennis courts and the proposed lights for the TCW athletic field. He opined that the athletic field lights are a disservice to neighboring residents and said he was ready to listen to Cindy’s answers.

**Issue #1: The Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) give taxpayers the least bang for the buck.** While Alexandria spends more per pupil than any school district in Virginia, except Arlington County, it ranks at the bottom in school performance while Arlington ranks in the top.

Cindy said that Alexandria is closing the achievement gap and added there are twice as many “needy” students in Alexandria as opposed to Arlington.

Bill said that the ACPS spends a significant amount of money on students but the results are poor and wanted to know what the ACPS plan is going forward.

Joe, a member of the audience, said that students at Hammond Middle School are issued Chrome digital devices and all they use them for is games and texting vice the original intention of helping with academics. He also said that teacher turnover is a big problem. Many teachers leave after 1 year.

Nan said it was her experience that teachers with seniority (and high salaries) approaching tenure were let go to avoid paying the high salaries and they were replaced by relatively junior teachers.

Annabelle Fisher, a member of the audience, asked how many children who do not live in the city were being educated at Alexandria taxpayer expense. The answer was very few since there is a ACPS staffer who monitors that issue.

Cindy ended the discussion of this issue by saying that the hardest part facing ACPS is training and retaining teachers.

**Issue #2: The apparent disconnect between City Staffs.** The Department of Planning has said for the past eight years that no new schools are needed while the ACPS staff says otherwise.

Cindy said there is much better cooperation now between city Planning and ACPS staffs.

Carol Johnson, a SHA Board Member in the audience, said that ACPS doesn’t arrange for cleanups when they jointly own the property with Alexandria Parks and Recreation. Too much stuff litters the playing fields and stadium areas.

Chris Lewis, Vice Chair of the School Board from District C, said that the Planning Department does work much better now with ACPS. Most of the audience disagreed with that statement.

**Issue #5: Management of funds by the ACPS, which is robbing us blind!** What is the School Board role in oversight of ACPS? How much transparency does the School Board have into ACPS funding? Call for an independent audit and inspection of ACPS and School Board management of the budget.

Bill said the ACPS gets approximately 44% of the City budget but the City has absolutely no control over the expenditure of funds by ACPS once the money is allocated by the City to ACPS. He said ACPS moves the money around as it see’s fit and basically the ACPS funding allocation by the City almost becomes a slush fund.

Chris said ACPS has the power to move funds around to cover unexpected higher priorities that develop during the budget year.

Dick Hayes, SHA Board member, said there appears to be no internal management controls. Audits apparently just basically check that ACPS doesn’t over expend their budget. This results in a lack of transparency between ACPS and Alexandria citizens who pay taxes to support the overall City budget as well as the ACPS portion.

**Issue #12: The ACPS proposal for four new schools at a cost of $515 Million.** What are the key components of the Superintendent’s proposed Capital Improvement Plan?

Bill stated that a study in 2009 recommended that the City needed more schools but nothing happened until now. What happened to the study recommendations? We probably need at least an elementary, middle and high school.

Cindy said collaboration between Planning and ACPS is much better now and things are getting better. This led to considerable back and forth discussion on the need for more schools.

**Additional Topics Discussed**

**7. The failure of the Patrick Henry Elementary School expansion process;** especially the decision by the School Board to reverse the recommendation of the Patrick Henry Advisory Committee concerning the option chosen to renovate and rebuild at the school.

Cindy had a rationale for that decision but it wasn’t well received by the audience.

It appeared to the audience that the Advisory Board was basically ignored and the School Board had their own priorities.

**8. The resolution to create a new TCW Community Advisory Board**, which wouldabrogate condition 69 the DSUP for TCW and expand the Advisory Group to include neighborhoods and groups that are NOT physically located next to the school. It makes the Superintendent in charge of the group and lets him appoint people and set term limits of 6 years.

Neither Cindy nor Chris had a reply as to the intent of the resolution.

Nan concluded the meeting by thanking Cindy and Bill for their participation on the panel as well as thanking the audience for their interest in improving our schools. The meeting adjourned at 9:45 PM.

Richard J. Hayes, Recorder

Board Members in attendance: Nan Jennings, Dick Hayes, Joe Fischer, Carter Flemming, Bill Goff, Richard Hunt, and Heather Zdancewicz.

Others in the audience included: Cindy Anderson, Chris Lewis, Carol Johnson, Steve Harkness, Judy Cooper, William Wannisky, Annabelle Fisher, Pamela Kesner, and Beth Chase.