

## District leaders weighing options for new Brunson

BY TEVIN STINSON  
THE CHRONICLE

Despite concerns from district leaders, more than 65% of parents, students and others with vested interest in the future of the new Brunson Elementary School want the school to be built at the Patterson Avenue site, which qualifies as a brownfield site with the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ).

Funding for a new Brunson was included in the 2016 Education Bonds by voters. Colon Moore, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools' director of facility planning and construction, said after initially eyeing nearly 30 sites at the beginning of the process, they were able to cut the list down to three options: merging Brunson and Cook Literacy Model School at the current Cook site, rebuild at the current Brunson site, or build the school on unused industrial property formally owned by Thomasville Furniture Company located between Patterson and Ivy Avenue near Northwest Blvd.

After testing was completed at all three sites in 2019, it was determined that none of the sites had anything that was unexpected for an urban site and all three were approved as possible sites for the school. Following further testing, the Patterson Avenue site was added to the NCDEQ's list of brownfield sites.

A brownfield site is an abandoned, idled or underused property where the threat of environmental contamination has hindered its redevelopment. The N.C. Brownfields Program, which is administered by the Division of Waste Management, is the state's effort to break this barrier to the redevelopment of these sites. The Brownfields Property Reuse Act of 1997 sets forth funding and other

assistance to help prospective developers to put the sites back to use.

A survey conducted by the district showed an overwhelming number of parents, teachers, students, and others from throughout the community preferred that the school be built at the Patterson site. Of the 598 people surveyed, 67% preferred that the school be built at the Patterson Avenue site.

Currently there are two schools in N.C. operating on sites in the Brownfields Program. One is located in Raleigh and the other, Carter G. Woodson, is located on Goldfloss Street here in Winston-Salem. In 2015 it was discovered concentrations of tetrachloroethylene or PCE and trichloroethylene or TCE, that exceeded screening levels set by the state. It was later determined that students and staff were not being exposed to the contamination.

Superintendent Dr. Angela Hairston made it clear that they didn't want the school to be built at the Patterson site. She said it would only take a few parents to complain about the site for it to become an issue of concern for the district. Hairston made a recommendation for the board to approve going with another option that would combine Brunson and Cook at the current Cook location, which was tabled for a future discussion.

About 25% said they wanted Brunson to be rebuilt at its current site at 155 Hawthorne Road. The issue with the current site is a creek that runs nearby the center that often causes flooding. The current Brunson site is likely to require Army Corp of Engineering approval for stream impacts based upon current design and will cost significantly more than the other two sites.

Only about 8% wanted the two schools to merge. Although Brunson

and Cook are currently less than 1.5 miles apart, it is important to note that about 42% of the households in Brunson's district make more than \$50,000 a year. In the Cook district, about 87% of households make less than \$50,000. Brunson is a magnet school that brings in students from across the district and offers several HAG (Highly Academically Gifted) programs. Cook is a Title I school, in year three of a new education model that also called for a new principal and the entire teaching staff. When discussing the future of Brunson, Dr. Hairston said more than 100 students currently living in the Cook attendance zone, live within half a mile of the proposed Patterson site. She said putting the school on Patterson could also cause issues for other

elementary schools in the area.

"When you look at that, the question became when you build a new site on Patterson ... one of the downfalls is it places you in proximity to Kimberley Park, Cook and Ashley," Hairston continued. "And so the question becomes, what do you do with those under-enrolled schools?"

With merger of the two schools, Hairston said the plan would be to mirror the merger of Lawrence Middle and Paisley IB Magnet Schools, just few blocks away from Cook. During the board of education meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 8, board member Elisabeth Motsinger raised concerns about one school taking over the other. "It scares me ... I feel like it's very easy for Cook to disappear in a merger of that sort."

Board member Bar-

bara Burke suggested that Brunson and Cook be merged at the proposed Patterson site. She said although it wasn't recommended to merge the schools at the Patterson site, she believes it would be a great opportunity for the students who attend Cook.

"If we do move in the direction of the Patterson location, I would like to suggest, propose, recommend that we combine Cook and Brunson at the Patterson location," Burke

said. "I believe it would be a great opportunity for students who attend Cook to be inside a brand new environment also."

The merger of the two schools can only be approved by the WS/FCS Board of Education. The districts can't move forward into the design phase until a location is chosen. The project is expected to take about 24 months to complete and early plans call for the school to open by start of 2023-2024 school year.

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### Voting

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information, occasionally slanted, and advertising about the major races, you may have to dig to find information about some of the "down-ballot" candidates even though the positions they are seeking have great bearing on our lives.

For example, the state legislative races sometimes get lost in the glare of the presidential, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and statewide races. Even though their jobs are always vitally important in many ways, the men and women we elect to the N.C. Legislature this time will have an especially critical duty: drawing the district lines for the 13 (or more, depending on Census results) representatives from our state to the U.S. House of Representatives for an entire upcoming decade.

Certainly, this deserves strong consideration, along with state taxes, Medicaid expansion, public education funding in the time of COVID, and environmental laws as we decide who to send to the N.C. Legislature.

City council members, county commissioners, school board members, and other local elected officials make decisions that affect our lives daily about textbooks, sidewalks, parks, property tax rates, speed limits, teacher pay, building permits, zoning, trash pickup, volunteer fire department support, locations for new schools, police and sheriff's department funding, and a host of other issues.

Judges' races often get

little attention from media outlets. The Judicial Voter Guide 2020 will be sent to all registered voters in the next several weeks by the state Board of Elections. This non-partisan guide provides basic information about judicial candidates' experience and qualifications, along with statements from the candidates about themselves.

One source of information about all candidates not to overlook is their websites. Since candidates are asking us to hire them, their websites are like job seekers' resumes which reflect them in the best possible light as to experience, professional achievements, personal information, and what they hope to accomplish.

Finally, two other excellent resources that strive to avoid bias are VOTE411.ORG, from the League of Women Voters, and BALLOTPEDIA.ORG. In addition to essential comparative information about candidates, the Ballotpedia resource also provides specific data about campaign contributions and spending.

Whether we decide to vote in person on Election Day, at an early-voting site, or by absentee ballot, it's up to each of us to do the prep work now.

Howard Pearre conducts training sessions for volunteers to assist with voter registration. He is a member of Winston-Salem Writers and recently received an honorable mention for his short story, "September, 1957," at the 2020 International Human Rights Arts Festival.