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HAMILTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

INTERNAL AUDIT

To: Weston Wamp, County Mayor
Hamilton County Commissioners
Audit Committee

From: Chris McCollough, County Auditor

Date: January 21, 2025

Subject: Audit of Gateway Project Allegations

During the October 30, 2024 Hamilton County Commission meeting, the chair of the County Commission publicly called for an audit of the allegations disclosed in the Chattanooga Times Free Press (TFP) article “Shifting Priorities”, published on Sunday October 27, 2024 (**See Exhibit VIII – Page 27-39**). While this is not the standard procedure or preferred method of engaging audits, the Hamilton County Audit Committee agreed to investigate the allegations. The scope of the allegations includes the period from August 2023 through August 2024. Our audit included a review of email correspondence (575 pages), contracts, purchase orders, and resolutions relating to the project. In addition, we met with key county personnel directly involved with the project. The following represents a summary of our audit procedures performed and conclusions reached.

BACKGROUND

In September 2022, Mayor Weston Wamp and School Superintendent Dr. Justin Robertson formed a Joint Facilities Task Force for future school projects. The task force released its proposals and joint recommendations in August 2023. After the release, there was a community input campaign for public feedback. On January 18, 2024, the school board approved the final recommendations for the school projects (**See Exhibit I – Pages 8-14**). After the school board's approval, the mayor's staff and school officials worked with two architectural firms to determine the estimated cost of each recommended school project. MTa, LLC was contracted to provide predesign reports to review the Gateway project, Howard High Gym, and Brainerd High building's existing conditions for potential school redevelopment. The Lewis Group Architects were contracted to conduct facility assessments for Dupont Elementary, Soddy Daisy Middle and High School, and Clifton Hills Elementary. The architectural firms produced reports for the

school projects, which were reviewed by Tucker McClendon, Deputy Mayor – Education & Workforce and Dr. Justin Robertson. The mayor’s staff also met with the commission facilities and education committee chairs to discuss the reports. The reports were then reviewed by key school officials.

On August 6, 2024, Mayor Wamp met with Superintendent Robertson to discuss the bond allocation for the school projects. Dr. Robertson then shared the projected bond allocation with the Hamilton County School Board. On August 14, 2024, the county commission unanimously voted to pass the school projects' bond. The bond closed on September 12, 2024.

FINDINGS

1. Misleading Information Regarding the Cost of Moving CCA

Allegation #1 – The TFP article stated, “...Wamp knew moving the Chattanooga High School Center for Creative Arts to a new Westside campus would cost more than \$80 million when he gave documents to the county commissioners in August estimating the project at half that cost.”

Observation—The MTa report indicates that moving Chattanooga High School Center for Creative Arts (CCA) to the Gateway would cost more than \$80 million (**Exhibit II – Page 15**). The \$40 million estimate was for developing the building as a new technical school and did not include the cost of moving CCA (**Exhibit III – Page 16**).

It is to be noted that prior administrations did not provide a proposed spending list on the bond funds. In an effort to be transparent, Mayor Wamp’s administration attached the 2024 Bond Issue Proposed Project Overview (**Exhibit IV – Page 17**) to resolution 824-9. The included exhibit shows that the proposed project overview for Gateway was \$40 million, but it did not elaborate on moving or not moving CCA to Gateway. This project overview report was just a funding proposal. It is the responsibility of the school board to approve which school projects to proceed with and how much to spend.

Allegation #2 – The TFP article stated, “Wamp and his staff had known since May, when a local architect hired by the county finished calculating the cost of pursuing the school board's **No. 1 priority**: creating Chattanooga High School: Center for the Creative Arts and High Tech Institute at the former BlueCross BlueShield Golden Gateway building on West M.L. King Boulevard. Even when asked for it by a county commission member in June, Wamp withheld the information about the total cost for weeks, records show. Since he took office, Mayor Wamp has held private meetings, secretly hired architects, delayed funding and provided misleading information to manipulate our community into supporting spending that doesn't address our most pressing needs but instead focuses on projects that boost his political career, Commissioner David Sharpe, D-Red Bank, told the Times Free Press by phone on Saturday.”

The article further stated, “When asked why Wamp told the commission the estimate was \$40 million and not \$80 million, his spokesperson, Mary Francis Hoots, said by email that the amount was intended to reflect the cost of a general high school that an architect hired by the county had been directed to study, not for the school board's priority project to move Chattanooga High School Center of Creative Arts (CCA) to Gateway.”

Observation – It was verified that neither Mayor Wamp nor any member of his staff ever stated the cost of any school project but informed the commission in June 2024 that the proposed project list and allocation for the bond issuance would be provided before the bond vote. The two estimates discussed in the allegation relate to two separate school initiatives. The Gateway Facility report produced by MTa provided estimated costs for four (4) scenarios (see chart below for each scenario). The \$40 million-plus estimate in the report was for renovating the first two floors of the Gateway building to create a new technical school, leaving the two upper levels as is. The \$80 million-plus estimate in the MTa report was for moving CCA to the Gateway building, which would include modifying all four levels and adding a production theater. At the time of the article, there was a discussion of approving \$15 million to create a career and technical training program at the Gateway building, described in scenario #1. The school board approved the Facilities Plan Final Recommendations Phase One dated 11/12/2024 on November 21, 2024 (**Exhibit V – Page 18-19**).

Scenario	Description	Estimated Project Cost
1	Technical School on the first level – 33,000 SF of the 189,456 SF	\$12,628,752
2	Technical School on the first level and minimal work for high school program without the athletic program -161,000 SF of the 189,456 SF	\$58,550,053
3	Technical School on the first level and remodeling for Chattanooga School of Creative Arts (CCA) program with a production theater.	\$82,207,992
4	Technical School on the first level and remodel the second level for the high school program – 111,000 SF of the 189,456 SF. The two upper levels will remain mostly as-is.	\$43,689,491

Source: MTa LLC report dated 5/28/2024

2. Predesign Estimates

Allegation – The TFP article stated, “Robertson, who sat on the task force Wamp appointed, which also included one commissioner and one school board member, said the idea to get predesign estimates came up in task force conversations, when the construction of Tyner Middle High Academy turned out to be much higher than previously expected. He said he didn't remember who made the suggestion....’This is the first time. We have never done predesign work. We always hired an architect and the architect designs it and then we take that out to bid. That is where we ran into the issue with Tyner,’ he told the Times Free Press by phone. ‘This is an additional step that we had not done in the past.’”

Observation—The estimated cost presented on January 18, 2024, in the Facilities Plan Final Recommendations (See Exhibit I – Pages 8-14), was based on figures submitted from the 2020 MGT report. MGT Consulting Group was hired by Hamilton County Schools to provide a Facilities Master Plan, during the prior mayor’s administration.

Due to the economic changes and the rise in construction costs, the 2024 predesign estimates work was to update outdated proposed funding figures. This was a new proactive step to help address budgeting challenges for large school projects, which the school superintendent, Dr. Robertson, stated in the article.

3. Closing of Clifton Hills Elementary

Allegation – The TFP article stated, “Clifton Hills Elementary, a school Wamp wanted to close, had been named the No. 2 priority of the school board in January, but the school's predesign report hadn't been expedited by the county with the others, records show. School board member Jill Black, D-Lookout Mountain, and others called that concerning...#Robertson said the school's proximity to a floodplain made the study more challenging.”

Observation – On March 20, 2020, MGT Consulting Group’s Facilities Master Plan (Exhibit VI – Page 20) recommended closing Clifton Hills Elementary. In addition, the School Board approved the Hamilton County School Facilities Plan Final Recommendations dated 1/18/2024 (Exhibit I - Page 9) of the report states the original proposal was to close Clifton Hills Elementary. However, the Hamilton County Facilities Plan recommended a new Clifton Hills school at the current site after receiving feedback from the community.

There were several complexities within the Clifton Hills Elementary project. These complexities included the following:

- rezoning the students to another school until the construction is completed;
- relocating the portable classrooms to an area of the site that will not conflict with construction;
- the potential conflict with the existing school parking lot with the new construction and;
- designing new construction above the flood zone and the premium costs associated with such construction.

Therefore, the architect needed more time to complete the Clifton Hills report. Consequently, the Dupont and Soddy Daisy predesign reports were completed first. The Clifton Hills report was dated November 1, 2024. Therefore, neither the Mayor nor his staff had access to the estimated cost of replacing Clifton Hills Elementary before the approval or issuance of the bond.

4. Circumventing Procurement Limits to Bypass Approval

Allegation #1 – The TFP article stated, “Wamp used county funds to pay architects to estimate costs for options that hadn't been approved by the school board in January, the records show. And the contracts with the architects were structured in such a way that he didn't have to seek commission approval for the spending or notify commissioners. The county paid for each study

on a case-by-case basis, as well as the extra hours racked up investigating options the school board hadn't approved. So although the total cost of all the studies exceeded the \$50,000 threshold requiring commission approval, each individual study fell below the \$25,000 threshold requiring Wamp to notify the commission of the expenditures.”

Observation – County records show that MTa LLC has been used for different projects related to the Public Works Department since August 2022, which preceded Mayor Wamp’s administration. The architectural contracts were issued based on each school’s assessment when the purchase orders were issued to provide a more reasonable estimate. Based on current procurement policy and according to Resolution 423-23 dated 4/05/2023, the purchase orders below did not violate any procurement rules, as alleged in the Times Free Press. Historically, purchase orders and contracts are issued to vendors by project or service for each department. Different architectural firms were contracted to expedite the project estimates to meet the bond issuance deadline. The Lewis Group in Knoxville, Tennessee, had completed many successful school projects in Knox County. Based on their success, they were contracted to provide cost estimates for school projects in Hamilton County.

Purchase orders related to predesign services from Architectural firms are listed in the chart below.

<i>Firm</i>	<i>Purchase Order No.</i>	<i>Date of PO</i>	<i>Projects</i>	<i>PO Amount</i>	<i>PO Disencumbered Amount</i>	<i>Amount Paid</i>
MTa LLC	P35638	01/04/2024	Howard High Gym	\$15,000.00	\$7,200.00	\$7,800.00
MTa LLC	P36213	03/25/2024	Gateway	\$21,000.00	\$2,181.00	\$18,819.00
MTa LLC	P36293	04/02/2024	Brainerd High	\$14,000.00	\$3,855.50	\$10,144.50
Lewis Group	P36441	05/15/2024	Dupont, Soddy Daisy, Clifton Hills	\$25,000.00	\$0.00	\$25,000.00

Note> The Howard project was not included in the proposed 2024 bond projected cost.

Allegation #2 – The TFP article stated, ‘The cost of the county’s architectural payouts were piling up. Kirk needed to pay Twitchell for additional work he’d been asked to do. “Is there any grant money available to cover or offset some of that or any additional cost?” Kirk wrote McClendon on May 9. “I’m not sure what you mean by grant funding?” McClendon wrote back. “Do we need to move funds around to cover this for your department?” And the county staff did move money around, records show.’

Observation – The above statement in the article, ‘The cost of the county’s architectural payouts were piling up. Kirk needed to pay Twitchell for additional work he’d been asked to do.’ This statement was an exaggeration and misrepresentation from the writer’s point of view. The additional cost referred to in the article by Mr. Kirk was related to the Harrison Bay Future Ready Center. It was a direct payment invoice in the amount of \$3,720.00. A purchase order should have

been issued according to the Hamilton County procurement rules. During our disbursement testing, we will implement additional testing to verify that the procurement policy is adhered to and that purchase orders are issued when required.

According to the county accounting records, the funds transfer in the article never happened in the FY2024 budget. Mr. Kirk's department was a newly formed department within the Public Works Division. Therefore, there was no budget for FY2024, so the invoices were paid out of the Public Works Administrative budget, which had adequate funds available.

5. Legal Authority Over School Projects

Allegation #1 – The TFP article stated, “Wamp had his own plan, the records show. He wanted the county to take the lead on some of the school construction projects, though traditionally those were all overseen by the school system. Once the county commission gives funds to the department of education, neither the commission, nor the county mayor has legal authority to direct the use of funds.”

Observation - Resolution 504-17 (**Exhibit VII – Page 21-26**) was approved on May 5, 2004, by the county commission, which allows the county to enter into an interlocal agreement with the board of education relative to the construction of school facilities. The memo provides guidelines on how this coordinated effort is carried out and is referred to as “the plan”. The plan begins with a project selection stage where the school board approves a list of school projects that are sent to the county commission for funding approval. The second stage of the plan involves project funding. The approved school projects are presented to the county commission, and the commission will vote on whether and to what extent the projects will be funded. Once the project funding stage is complete, a review committee will be formed in order to select the architects and engineers who will be used to facilitate the projects. Currently, the county has completed the first two stages of the plan but has not yet formed the review committee. Therefore, the Mayor did not violate the interlocal agreement with Hamilton County Schools.

Allegation #2 – The TFP article stated, “Robertson told school board members Monday that the school system had signed a memorandum of understanding giving county government the reins on several projects. The memo was never authorized by the commission in the form of a resolution, and the mayor does not have unilateral authority to bind the county in such an agreement.”

Observation – The Chattanooga Times Free Press appropriately redacted this statement on October 29th from the original article dated October 27, 2024.

6. The Mayor's Staff Edited the Architect's Report

Allegation – The TFP article stated, “The production theater is significantly more expensive than any surrounding ‘educational’ construction and has been tallied separately for transparency,” the architect's report, edited by Wamp and his staff, said.”

Observation – On May 13, 2024, Matthew Twitchell, MTa LLC emailed the Gateway report to Todd Leamon and Michael Kirk for review. On May 24, 2024, Matthew Twitchell met with Mayor Wamp to review the report. On May 30, 2024, an email from Matthew Twitchell stated that he revised the report. The changes stated were (Scheme 2 was 6.6 mils lighter than it should have been, removed the 2 “demo the site” schemes, and also added new air-conditioning to the last 3 schemes), along with a math error Mayor Wamp alluded to during the May 24th meeting. The auditor’s office received the architectural reports directly from the firms and compared reports provided in the open records request. During our audit, there was no indication that Mayor Wamp or his staff edited the architect's reports before presentation to the County Commission and the public.

AUDITORS' OPINION

The allegations of procedural violations and misrepresentations lack substantial evidence. During our audit, we did not note anything to indicate that Mayor Wamp misled the public or intended to mislead the public regarding the cost of renovating the Gateway Building for housing CCA.

If there are any questions regarding this report, please call Austin Durall, Audit Manager, at 209-6211 or me at 209-6212.

Chris McCollough

Chris McCollough, County Auditor

Staff Assigned to Audit

Austin Durall, Audit Manager

J.C. Clonts, Staff Auditor

EXHIBIT I

Facilities Plan Final Recommendations Years 1-3

1/18/24



1 *Renovate Gateway into 6-12 Chattanooga High School*

Renovate the Gateway campus into Chattanooga High School. See attached one-page document for details.

\$50 million

2 *Build Clifton Hills on Current Site*

Build a new Clifton Hills on the current site, taking into consideration the floodplain, designed to hold 800 students. If appropriate, renovate existing space and build additional new space (similar to CSLA).

\$35-40 million

3 *Build Soddy Daisy Middle on Current Site*

Build a new Soddy Daisy Middle School on the current site. If appropriate, renovate existing space and build additional new space (similar to CSLA).

\$30-50 million

4 *Consolidation of Rivermont, Dupont and Alpine Crest*

Build a new elementary school combining the Alpine Crest, Rivermont, and Dupont school communities on the existing Dupont site. Utilize existing capacity at Red Bank Elementary and Hixson Elementary for a student population between 650-800 students.

\$35-40 million

5 *Renovate Brainerd 6-12 Campus on Current Site*

Renovate the current Brainerd HS site into a 6-12 campus combining both Dalewood MS and Brainerd HS communities. The expanded site will include an addition, renovations to much of the existing building, and athletic upgrades on the new 6-12 campus.

\$25-30 million

6 *Expand Thrasher Elementary School*

Expand Thrasher Elementary to hold 800 students

\$15-\$20 million

7 *Renovate former Cigna Building into K-2 Campus*

Renovate the existing former Cigna building into a K-2 primary school serving the East Brainerd Elementary zone.

\$15-\$20 million

Phased out Closure of Howard Connect Academy

Begin phased out closure of Howard Connect Academy by not accepting an incoming 6th grade class in the fall of 2024.

7 buildings improved | 11 school communities served | \$205 - \$250 Million spent

Renovate Gateway into 6-12 Chattanooga High School	
ORIGINAL PROPOSAL	The Gateway campus presents an opportunity to build on Hamilton County's legacy of excellence in magnet schools and career and technical education.
WHAT WE HEARD	Clarification is needed about the proposal's specifics and impacts. Focus on preserving the unique culture of CCA, alongside concerns about capacity, program integrity, and the broader impact of the proposed changes on students and the community. Feasibility concerns of integrating multiple educational pathways. The importance of expanding CTE opportunities, especially those with a design and technical emphasis, is emphasized as a way to provide valuable skills for the future workforce.
FINAL RECOMMENDATION	Renovate Gateway into 6-12 Chattanooga High School - \$50 Million Priority 1 Renovate the Gateway campus into Chattanooga High School. See attached one page document for details.

Build Clifton Hills on Current Site	
ORIGINAL PROPOSAL	Large expansions to Eastside and East Lake Elementary will allow for the closure of Clifton Hills Elementary, an aging, overcrowded school located in a flood zone.
WHAT WE HEARD	Overall, there is a strong sentiment against the plan as it reads, with stakeholders expressing a desire for more involvement in the decision-making process. Participants highlighted the need for careful consideration of safety, cultural sensitivity, student well-being, staff support, and maintaining community bonds in any future developments. Participants emphasized the need for well-equipped facilities, thoughtful building design, and strong community involvement in the new school.
FINAL RECOMMENDATION	Build Clifton Hills on Current Site - \$35-\$40 Million Priority 2 Build a new Clifton Hills on the current site, taking into consideration the flood zone, designed to hold 800 students. If appropriate, renovate existing space and build additional new space (similar to CSLA).

Build Soddy Daisy Middle School on Current Site	
ORIGINAL PROPOSAL	Dramatically expand Daisy Elementary to create a K-12 experience on the shared campus of Daisy Elementary and Soddy Daisy High School. This will allow for growth in the Soddy Daisy area while strengthening the relationship between SDMS and SDHS, while eliminating the current Soddy Daisy Middle School facility.
WHAT WE HEARD	Increased traffic and safety were the primary concerns identified including questions about emergency dismissals, staggered start times, and the exposure of elementary students to older peers. This indicates a need for detailed planning and communication with stakeholders. The capacity of the new school, the fate of the Soddy Daisy Middle School (SDMS) campus, and the choice of combining on one site are also contentious. Concerns about behavioral management in larger schools, shared transportation for different age groups, and the logistics of navigating a large campus highlight the need for thoughtful design and resource allocation. Furthermore, questions suggest a need for a broader discussion about resource distribution and community impact.
FINAL RECOMMENDATION	Build Soddy Daisy Middle School on Current Site - \$30-\$50 Million Priority 3 Build a new Soddy Daisy Middle School on the current site. If appropriate, renovate existing space and build additional new space (similar to CSLA).

Consolidation of Rivermont, Dupont and Alpine Crest	
ORIGINAL PROPOSAL	Build a new elementary school on the large site of Dupont Elementary, consolidating three of the four small, aging schools (Alpine Crest, Dupont, Hixson, and Rivermont) onto one world class campus.
WHAT WE HEARD	Overall, there is a strong sentiment against the plan as it reads, with stakeholders expressing a desire for more involvement in the decision-making process. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining small school cultures and meeting the unique needs of diverse student populations. Desire to explore alternative consolidation plans that include enhancing existing facilities, zoning and enrollment strategies, and leveraging community resources while still meeting the needs of each school community.
FINAL RECOMMENDATION	Consolidation of Rivermont, Dupont, and Alpine Crest- \$35-40 Million Priority 4 Build a new elementary school combining the Alpine Crest, Rivermont, and Dupont school communities on the existing Dupont site. Utilize existing capacity at Red Bank Elementary and Hixson Elementary for a student population between 650-800 students.

Renovate Brainerd 6-12 Campus on Current Site

ORIGINAL PROPOSAL	<p>Brainerd High School's declining enrollment presents the county with an opportunity to align the school's academic and athletic mission with others like Signal Mountain and Tyner Academy by co-locating middle school and high school. Closing Dalewood Middle School and expanding and renovating Brainerd's campus will ignite a new era of greatness at one of our community's proudest schools.</p>
WHAT WE HEARD	<p>A prominent concern revolves around the merger of middle and high school students, with many expressing unease about potential safety issues and the impact on younger students. The historical and cultural significance of both Dalewood and Brainerd schools is a recurring theme, with worries about losing community identity and the legacy of these institutions. Questions about the fate of Dalewood's property and programs, along with logistical issues such as traffic congestion and the adequacy of facilities, highlight the need for a more detailed and transparent plan. The community also seeks reassurance on maintaining effective teacher-student ratios and ensuring that the unique needs of special education students are met in the new setup.</p>
FINAL RECOMMENDATION	<p>Renovate Brainerd High School in 6-12 site- \$25-30 Million Priority 5</p> <p>Renovate the current Brainerd High School site into a 6-12 campus combining both Dalewood Middle and Brainerd High School communities. The expanded site will include an addition, renovations to much of the existing building, and athletic upgrades on the new 6-12 campus.</p> <p>Additionally, consider moving Barger Elementary School to the current Dalewood building after the new 6-12 Brainerd campus is complete.</p>

Expand Thrasher Elementary

ORIGINAL PROPOSAL	<p>Thrasher Elementary is well known as one of Tennessee's finest elementary schools, but rapid growth of young families on Signal Mountain has overwhelmed the current facility.</p>
WHAT WE HEARD	<p>Increased traffic and potential safety issues were a frequent concern. Ensure any expansion includes larger facilities to accommodate for future growth and addresses existing issues. Support for addressing current facility issues through expansion</p>
FINAL RECOMMENDATION	<p>Expand Thrasher Elementary- \$15-20 Million Priority 6</p> <p>Expand Thrasher Elementary to hold 800 students</p>

Renovate Former Cigna Building into New East Brainerd K-2 Campus

ORIGINAL PROPOSAL	Follow through on plans to provide for continued growth in East Brainerd by developing the recently acquired Cigna facility into an expansion of East Brainerd Elementary.
WHAT WE HEARD	Participants seek clarification on expansion plans such as whether the entire school will move to Cigna or specific grade levels. Participants would like to know how staff and students will be integrated to maintain a sense of unity. A plan for continued area growth and increased traffic was requested. Rezoning is not preferred as a way to address continued growth in the area. A recommendation was made to hold tours of the new facility for parents.
FINAL RECOMMENDATION	Renovate former Cigna building into K-2 campus- \$15-20 Million Priority 7 Renovate the existing former Cigna building into a K-2 primary school serving the East Brainerd Elementary zone

Phased out Closure of Howard Connect Academy

FINAL RECOMMENDATION	Begin phased out closure of Howard Connect Academy by not accepting an incoming 6th grade class in the fall of 2024
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PROPOSAL

Chattanooga High School: Center for Creative Arts and High Tech Institute

In Hamilton County Schools (HCS) our vision is that by 2030, HCS will be a leader in developing our diverse graduates to be **connected, competitive and life ready**. Located on the current Gateway site, the **development of Chattanooga High School** is one step we can take as a community towards making this vision a reality for our students in HCS.

The new Chattanooga High School will be located in a **fully reimagined space** providing access to areas that support **academic** excellence, full access to the **arts**, and hands-on, **experiential workspaces** with close links to the high-tech workplace through two dedicated pathways: The Center for Creative Arts and the High Tech Institute.

As **unique pathways combined under one roof**, The Center for Creative Arts will continue its commitment to the arts, balanced with its rigorous college preparatory academic program. The new High Tech Institute will establish a connection to the local high tech industry in downtown Chattanooga as it continues to evolve. Both CCA and the High Tech Institute will foster a commitment to **rigorous academics, design thinking, project based learning experiences and real-word connections**.

Proposed Facility Resources:

Center for Creative Arts

- New performance spaces:
Auditorium and Black Box Theater
- State of the art technical theater equipment
- Multiple-medium Art Studio spaces
- Dance and Musical theater studios
- Music rooms with vocal and instrumental spaces
- Digital art, recording, film, and technical theater.

High Tech Institute

- Current CTE pathways
- High tech hands on lab space
- Computer Science lab space
- Internship and apprenticeship opportunities aligned to new and existing local industries and businesses

General Education

- Classrooms
- Library
- Multipurpose Room
- Cafeteria and outdoor eating terrace

For more information, visit:

www.hcde.org/blueprint



PROPOSAL

Chattanooga High School: Center for Creative Arts and High Tech Institute

Frequently Asked Questions:

Will Chattanooga High School include all of the studios, rehearsal spaces, performance spaces, etc. that students at Center for Creative Arts currently have access to?

Yes! The vision for the design of Chattanooga High School includes expanded, not limited, access for students in all arts majors.

Will the school have access to typical school resources such as libraries, multi-purpose room, cafeteria, etc.?

Yes. The newly renovated space will be a fully functional school environment for students with additional resources designed around the pathways of study offered at the school.

Will the school have a full athletics program on the new campus?

No. The physical campus space does not allow room for athletic facilities on site. Students attending Chattanooga High School who want to participate in athletics can participate in athletic partnership at another school location.

Will existing equipment located at the current CCA site be able to transfer to this new site to support the arts pathway?

Yes. Existing equipment that can be moved will be relocated to the new site during the renovation process.

Will there be additional staff to support both pathways available at Chattanooga High School?

Yes. Staffing will be supported through our district staffing model and allocated according to the model for supporting school pathways.

Will there continue to be an audition process for students at Chattanooga High School?

Yes. Chattanooga High School: Center for Creative Arts and The High Tech Institute will continue to have an admissions process that connects both fit and aptitude to enrollment in each unique pathway.

For more information, visit:

www.hcde.org/blueprint

EXHIBIT II

Scenario No. 3 – Provide Minimal work for Technical School on the first level. Remodeling as required to host The Chattanooga School for Creative Arts program with a new production theater. This includes:

1. The work required to upgrade as required by the State to change occupancy and to upgrade the full existing building as required by the City of Chattanooga code.
2. The modification of 169,700 SF (189,456 SF total) on all 4 levels.
3. Programmatically this is the same as Scenario No. 3 except for Areas provided specifically for CCA's program of 156,700 SF.
4. The addition of a 20,000 SF Auditorium with a working stage. This space will provide the required storm shelter.
5. Assumed the existing HVAC system would be replaced.

Gateway Development Scenario No. 3				
Building Revisions Required for Occupancy Change				
189,456	\$15	per SF	\$2,841,840	Allowance for Structural, Fire Alarm revisions
Kitchen and serving lines				
1	\$1,700,000	1,100 Occ	\$1,700,000	Kitchen with all new equipment
Site Revisions for CCA				
1	\$2,000,000	Al.	\$2,000,000	Allowance for Fire Line modifications and site adjustments for traffic modifications
HVAC Revisions with new System				
189,456	\$62	per SF	\$11,746,272	Allowance for new HVAC systems
Building Revisions for CCA program				
136,700	\$185	per SF	\$25,289,500	Allowance for Specific Program revisions
Building Revisions for Technical program				
33,000	\$200	per SF	\$6,600,000	Allowance for Specific Program revisions
New Theater Addition for CCA program				
20,000	\$1,000	per SF	\$20,000,000	Allowance for theater and ancillary support spaces
			\$70,177,612	Sub-total for Scenario No. 3
			\$7,017,761	GC OH&P
			\$77,195,373	Total Construction Cost for Scenario No. 3
			6.4934%	Designer's Fee percentage
			\$5,012,619	Designer's Fees
			Unknown	Furniture, Fixtures, Equipment
			Unknown	Special inspections
			\$82,207,992	Project Cost

EXHIBIT III

Scenario No. 4 – Provide Minimal work for Technical School on the first level. Remodel the 2nd level with the High School programmatic area. The two upper levels will remain mostly “as-is” and will continue to operate as a business occupancy. This includes:

1. The work required to upgrade as required by the State to change occupancy and to upgrade the full existing building as required by the City of Chattanooga code.
2. The modification of 111,000 SF (189,456 SF total) on the two lower levels.
3. Programmatically this school can hold up to 800 students but will be limited to providing trade-type electives on the lower level.
4. Assumed the existing HVAC system would be replaced on the lower two levels only.

Gateway Development Scenario No. 4				
Building Revisions Required for Occupancy Change				
189,456	\$15	per SF	\$2,841,840	Allowance for Structural, Fire Alarm revisions
Kitchen and serving lines				
1	\$1,300,000	800 Occ	\$1,300,000	Kitchen with all new equipment
Addition of Exterior Modular Storm Shelter				
8	\$374,417	each	\$2,995,336	Allowance based on Occupant load of 800
Site Revisions for of High school				
1	\$750,000	AI	\$750,000	Allowance for Fire Line modifications storm shelter placement and site adjustments for traffic modifications
HVAC Revisions with new System				
111,000	\$62	per SF	\$6,882,000	Allowance for new HVAC systems
Building Revisions for New Main Entry				
2,000	\$700	per SF	\$1,400,000	Allowance for new High School Entry with elevator
Building Revisions for Technical School program				
33,000	\$200	per SF	\$6,600,000	Allowance for Technical School program
Building Revisions for High school program				
78,000	\$185	per SF	\$14,430,000	Allowance for High School program
			\$37,199,176	Sub-total for Scenario No. 4
			\$3,719,918	GC OH&P
			\$40,919,094	Total Construction Cost for Scenario No. 4
			6.7704%	Designer's Fee percentage
			\$2,770,397	Designer's Fees
			Unknown	Furniture, Fixtures, Equipment
			Unknown	Special inspections
			\$43,689,491	Project Cost

HAMILTON COUNTY GOVERNMENT

2024 BOND ISSUE

Proposed Projects Overview*

Brainerd/Dalewood to 6-12	\$25 to \$30 million
Clifton Hills Elementary	\$10 to \$20 million
Deferred Maintenance	\$60 million
Gateway	\$40 million**
New North River Elementary	\$42 million
Soddy Daisy Middle	\$25 to \$30 million
Thrasher Elementary	\$5 million
School Contingencies and other projects	\$10 to \$20 million
General Government Projects	\$10 million
Recreation Investments	\$5 million ***

WWTA

Wastewater Investments	\$10 million****
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*Subject to county commission approval on a project by project basis

**Not including \$2 million in state funding

***Funded through Hotel/Motel Tax Revenue

****Funded by WWTA

11/12/24

Renovate Gateway into Future Ready Center

Phase one renovation of the Gateway campus into Future Ready Center modeled after Harrison Bay Future Ready Center. (CCA stays at its current location.)

\$15 million

Renovate & Build Addition for Clifton Hills

Explore options to renovate existing facility and build additional new space on current site and explore option to create an addition to East Side Elementary and rezone.

\$36 million

Renovate & Build Addition for Soddy Daisy Middle

Renovate existing facility and build additional new space on current site to create high quality learning environment for Soddy Daisy community.

\$30 million

Consolidation of Alpine Crest, Dupont, and Rivermont

Build an elementary school combining Alpine Crest, Dupont, and, Rivermont communities on the existing Dupont site. Rezone area for a student enrollment between 650-800 students.

\$51 million

Renovate Brainerd 6-12 Campus on Current Site

Renovate the Brainerd HS site into a 6-12 campus combining Dalewood and Brainerd communities. The site will include an addition, renovations, and athletic upgrades on the new 6-12 campus.

\$36 million

Facilities Approvals

Approval One: Approve the construction process for the projects outlined above. We will utilize the recommendations from MTa and Lewis Group Architects to begin the build process for all projects simultaneously.

Approval Two: Throughout construction we will have the option to utilize the Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR)* process instead of the typical the design build process for all projects to promote process efficiency and appropriate stewardship of funds where appropriate.

**Utilizing a construction manager for keeping projects within an guaranteed maximum price.*

Note: Costs listed are based on architect estimates and have the potential to change.

Exploration of Facility Options

Hamilton County Schools is committed to ensuring every school has equitable access to resources such as facilities, technology, and operations that meet individual students' needs. As we explore possible facility options for phase two, we will consider the strategies and metrics in our strategic plan, Opportunity 2030.

Normal Park

- Explore options for long term plan for facility upgrades and possible K-12 pathway.

Gateway Phase Two

- Explore options to utilize the remainder of Gateway space. *(Potentially explore additional Future Ready Center partnerships.)*

Center for Creative Arts

- Explore upgrades at the current location.

Elementary Space on Signal Mountain

- Explore options for expansion of elementary school space on Signal Mountain.

Orchard Knob Middle School

- Explore options for long term plan for facilities upgrades.

Barger Moving to Former Dalewood Site

- Explore options to renovate former Dalewood space for Barger Elementary.

Renovate Existing Cigna Building:

- Explore options for immediate relief for East Brainerd Elementary seats through PreK expansion or other opportunities.

Exploration Approvals

Approval*: Use fund balance to hire architect(s) for exploration of above facilities with an amount not to exceed a total amount of \$100,000.

**If approved administration will submit a notification of cost and architect to the Board at the next meeting after hire.*

Recommendations for Phase 1

Excerpt from MGT Consulting Group report dated March 3, 2020.

PHASE	SITE NAME	RECOMMENDATION	NEW CONSTRUCTION/ ADDN FOR CAPACITY	SCHOOL TOTAL
PHASE 1				
1	Alpine Crest ES	Close, merge with Dupont and Rivermont at Dupont site		\$ -
1	Clifton Hills ES	Close, students to new school (Clifton Hills site)		\$ -
1	Normal Park (Lower)	Close, students to renovated CCA site		\$ -
1	Normal Park (Upper)	Close, students to renovated CCA site		\$ -
1	Rivermont ES	Close, students to new Dupont		\$ -
1	East Ridge HS	Renovation		\$ 31,311,400
1	East Ridge MS	Renovation, balance utilization with East Hamilton MS		\$ 10,501,400
1	New ES, replacement for Clifton Hills	New, students from Clifton Hills, balance utilization with Eastlake	1,000	\$ 35,421,600
1	New ES site, Clifton Hills replacement	New site, verify Clifton Hills location		\$ -
1	New elementary school on CSLA site (K-5)	New ES, students from E. Brainerd ES, Woodmore, Eastridge, and Barger	1,000	\$ 35,421,600
1	New downtown site for CCA	New site		\$ -
1	Orchard Knob MS (includes Dalewood)	Replace with New MS, balance utilization with Dalewood and East Lake	1,200	\$ 49,808,700
1	Tyner Academy (HS)	Replace to 6-12, students from Tyner MS	1,500	\$ 74,287,500
1	Tyner MS	Close, students to new Tyner 6-12		\$ -
1	Wallace A. Smith ES	Renovation Suit Only and Addition, balance utilization with Ooletwah ES	300	\$ 13,955,600
1	CCA / New Normal Park	Repurpose, Renovation for Normal Park, Renovate and Addition new K-12.	280	\$ 37,501,300
1	New School for CCA	New School K-12 program.	1,300	\$ 46,048,100
1	Dupont ES	New/Replace, consider land purchase. Students from Alpine Crest and Rivermont.	1,200	\$ 42,505,900
1	New Apison region elementary site	New site		\$ -
PHASE 1 RECOMMENDATIONS TOTAL				\$377,859,437





Hamilton County Board of Commissioners

RESOLUTION

No. 504-17

A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE ENTERING INTO OF AN INTERLOCAL AGREEMENT WITH THE HAMILTON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION RELATIVE TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF SCHOOL FACILITIES, AND AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY MAYOR TO EXECUTE SAID DOCUMENT.

WHEREAS, by previous verbal agreements between the Hamilton County Board of Education ("School Board") and Hamilton County ("County"), in addition to financing the construction of new schools, the County has managed the construction as designated and prioritized by the Hamilton County Board of Education; and

WHEREAS, the School Board and County now feel that a more formal agreement is needed to clearly define how the process of selecting which schools are to be constructed as well as the means by which architects and general contractors are selected.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THIS COUNTY LEGISLATIVE BODY IN SESSION ASSEMBLED:

That the attached Interlocal Agreement between the Hamilton County Board of Education and the County is hereby approved as to its content and purpose, and that the County Mayor is hereby authorized to execute said Agreement.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THIS RESOLUTION TAKE EFFECT FROM AND AFTER ITS PASSAGE, THE PUBLIC WELFARE REQUIRING IT.

Approved: [checked] CERTIFICATION OF ACTION
Rejected: [unchecked] W. H. Knowles by Debbie Rodolfo County Clerk
Approved: [checked] [Signature] County Executive
Vetoed: [unchecked] May 5, 2004 Date



RHEUBIN MCGHEE TAYLOR
COUNTY ATTORNEY

DAVID W. NORTON
ASSISTANT COUNTY ATTORNEY

MARY NEILL SOUTHERLAND
ASSISTANT COUNTY ATTORNEY



**HAMILTON COUNTY GOVERNMENT
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY ATTORNEY**

CLAUDE T. RAMSEY
COUNTY EXECUTIVE
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
CURTIS D. ADAMS
RICHARD CASAVANT
LARRY L. HENRY
WILLIAM R. COTTON, JR.
JOANNE H. FAVORS
BILL HULLANDER
BEN F. MILLER
FRED R. SKILLERN
CHARLOTTE E. VANDERGRIF

MEMORANDUM

TO: Debbie Rollins, County Court Clerk's Office
FROM: Rheubin M. Taylor, County Attorney
DATE: August 19, 2004
RE: Inter-Local Agreement Among Hamilton County Board of
Education and Hamilton County, Tennessee

Enclosed, please find a copy of the Agreement between Hamilton County Board of Education and Hamilton County, Tennessee, that has been signed by all authorized officers involved.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call.

Enclosure

Cc: Claude Ramsey, County Mayor
Dr. Jesse Register, Director of Schools
Curtis D. Adams, Chairman of the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners
Chip Baker, Chairman of the Hamilton County School Board

L: Memo: HCSB agreement.doc

**INTER-LOCAL AGREEMENT AMONG HAMILTON COUNTY BOARD OF
EDUCATION AND HAMILTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

THIS INTER-LOCAL AGREEMENT (hereinafter referred to as the "Agreement") made and entered into by and between the HAMILTON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION acting through its Director of Schools (hereinafter referred to as "Board"), and HAMILTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE, acting through its County Mayor (hereinafter referred to as "County").

WHEREAS, Tennessee Code Annotated §§ 5-1-113, 5-1-114 and 12-9-101 et seq. provide for inter-local agreements and inter-local cooperation; and

WHEREAS, the County is authorized by law to levy taxes, issue general obligation bonds and to appropriate funds necessary to finance school projects which are approved by the Board; and

WHEREAS, the Board is authorized by Title 49 of the Tennessee Code Annotated to be responsible for school location, design and construction; and

WHEREAS, the statutory scheme in Tennessee contemplates reasonable cooperation between the County, as the revenue raising agency and the Board as the revenue spending agency, and both parties recognize that without such coordination there would be great confusion in the fiscal affairs of the County.

WHEREAS, the intent of this Agreement is to provide a recommended plan for future school construction projects under which the County and Board will work together to assure the best quality schools for the lowest cost possible.

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the premises, and the mutual obligations assumed herein, the parties hereby agree as follows:

1. General Purpose. The general purpose of this Agreement is to provide for a plan for future school construction projects under which the County and Board will work together to assure the best quality schools for the lowest possible price.

2. Definition of Terms. Pursuant to this Agreement, the terms defined in this article shall have the meanings given them.

a. County. Hamilton County, a constitutional county of the State of Tennessee.

b. Board. The Hamilton County Board of Education.

c. School Projects. School Projects shall mean new construction and/or renovation of school facilities which are funded by bonds issued by the County.

3. Term. The initial term of this Agreement shall be for three (3) years beginning with the date of May 1, 2004, and ending April 30, 2007.

4. Renewal. After the initial three-year term, this Agreement shall be automatically renewed on an annual basis unless either party provides written notice of non-renewal one hundred and twenty (120) days prior to the expiration of the current term.

5. Right to Terminate. Notwithstanding the provisions defining the Term and Renewal of this Agreement, either party may terminate this Agreement upon giving a one hundred and twenty (120) day notice to the other party.

6. The Plan:

a. Project Selection. During the term of this Agreement, the Board will approve a list of one or more School Projects for submission to the County for funding approval.

b. Project Funding. Upon presentation of the approved list of School Projects by the Board to the County, the County will then vote on whether, and to what extent, funding for said School Projects should be approved. In the event, the County votes to approve funding for some or all of the School Projects, the parties will establish a Review Committee which shall proceed to the selection of architects and/or engineers.

c. Review Committee. The Review Committee will consist of:

- i. One (1) Hamilton County Board member from the Commission District wherein the project(s) is located;
- ii. One (1) Hamilton County Commissioner from the Commission District wherein the project(s) is located;
- iii. The HCDE Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services;
- iv. The Hamilton County Engineer;
- v. The Director of Public Works for Hamilton County; and
- vi. One (1) member of public to be designated by the Board Chairman.

For School Projects that are system-wide and/or extend into more than one District, the County Commissioner on the Review Committee will be appointed by the Chairman of the Commission and the Board member will be appointed by the Chairman of the Board.

A Review Committee will be convened with respect to each School Project for the purpose of reviewing proposals from interested architectural/engineering firms and then will select five firms to interview. The Review Committee on each project will then select three (3) firms to recommend as properly qualified to perform the work. The list of three will then be forwarded to the County Mayor and the Director of Schools for consideration. If the School Project is system-wide and/or extends into more than one District, only one Review Committee will be convened.

d. County Mayor and Director of Schools Recommendation. Upon receipt of the list of three recommendations from the Review Committee(s), the County Mayor and the Director of Schools will meet and select one firm as their joint recommendation on who should perform the work.

e. Selection of Architect/Engineer. The recommendation of the County Mayor and the Director of Schools will then be submitted to the Board for approval and the County for funding approval. Upon approval, contracts will be prepared by the County Attorney and the Hamilton County Department of Education ("HCDE") Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services between the architect/engineer and the County and the Board. The County Mayor and Director of Schools are authorized to execute the contract(s) on behalf of the County and Board, respectively.

f. Contractor Selection. After selection of the architect/engineer, a bid package (including project plans) shall be prepared by the architect/engineer in cooperation with the HCDE Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services. The School Project plans are to be approved by the Board prior to submission for bidding. The lowest and most responsive bid by a general contractor will then be submitted to the Board for approval and the County for funding approval. Upon approval, the contract(s) will be prepared by the County Attorney and the HCDE Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services between the contractor, the County and the Board. The County Mayor and Director of Schools are authorized to execute the contract(s) on behalf of the County and the Board, respectively.

g. Value Engineering. The HCDE Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services shall work with the selected architect/engineer and contractor to determine whether "value engineering" various project components is possible in an effort to save costs. The items shall be presented to the Board for approval and the County for funding approval.

h. Change Orders. All change orders shall be submitted to the Board for approval and then to the County for funding approval.

i. Construction Progress. The HCDE Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services, or other Hamilton County Education Department staff as deemed appropriate, shall inform the County and the Board of the progress of the construction on School Projects on a regular basis.

j. Payment of Invoices. Invoices or draw requests for payment on School Projects shall be signed as approved by the HCDE Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary and forwarded to the County Finance Office for payment.

k. Contract Disputes. The County and Board designate the HCDE Assistant Superintendent of Auxiliary Services as their authorized representative to resolve any contract disputes which do not adversely impact the Project funding or overall design. If litigation arises from a contract dispute, the County Attorney is authorized to represent

the County and the Board. Any settlement of litigation is subject to approval by the County and the Board.

1. The Board and County agree to follow the Disadvantaged Business Enterprises Utilization Guidelines, as reflected in Resolution No. 701-40 of the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners, with respect to all contracts on School Projects contemplated by this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have caused their respective names to be affixed by their duly authorized officers on the 20th day of April, 2004.

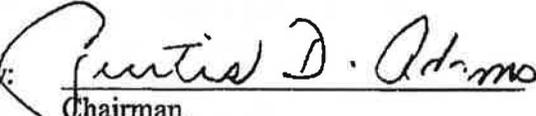
HAMILTON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

By: 
Claude Ramsey, County Mayor

HAMILTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

By: 
Dr. Jesse Register, Director of Schools

HAMILTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

By: 
Chairman

HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

By: 
Chairman

Wamp changed gears from board direction on downtown school

Chattanooga Times Free Press · 27 Oct 2024 · A1 · BY JOAN MCCLANE STAFF WRITER

Hundreds of pages of emails, texts and architectural reports obtained by the Chattanooga Times Free Press show Hamilton County Mayor Weston Wamp knew moving the Chattanooga High School Center for Creative Arts to a new Westside campus would cost more than \$80 million when he gave documents to the county commissioners in August estimating the project at half that cost.



Wamp and his staff had known since May, when a local architect hired by the county finished calculating the cost of pursuing the school board's No. 1 priority: creating Chattanooga High School: Center for the Creative Arts and High Tech Institute at the former BlueCross BlueShield Golden Gateway building on West M.L. King Boulevard.

Even when asked for it by a county commission member in June, Wamp withheld the information about the total cost, records show.

“Since he took office, Mayor Wamp has held private meetings, secretly hired architects, delayed funding and provided misleading information to manipulate our community into supporting spending that doesn't address

our most pressing needs but instead focuses on projects that boost his political career,” Commissioner David Sharpe, D-Red Bank, told the Times Free Press by phone on Saturday.

When asked why Wamp told the commission the estimate was \$40 million and not \$80 million, his spokesperson, Mary Francis Hoots, said by email that the amount was intended to reflect the cost of a general high school that an architect hired by the county had been directed to study, not for the school board’s priority project to move CCA to Gateway.

“The mayor’s vision has always been for the site to be used for career and technical education, which is lacking in Hamilton County’s urban communities,” Hoots said, when asked what Wamp now wants to see happen. “The idea of moving CCA downtown was interesting, but upon analysis, the Gateway campus is not conducive to CCA’s needs, and the cost of redeveloping the facility into an arts school would be prohibitive for taxpayers.”

With construction costs rising, school leaders hoped the county would move quickly on the projects the school board approved in January, but Wamp waited to seek commission funding until August, less than two weeks after five new school board members were elected.

The school board alone holds the authority to determine the school system’s agenda for school construction and campus closures, but records show Wamp had his own agenda.

Wamp used county funds to pay architects to estimate costs for options that hadn’t been approved by the school board in January, the records show. And the contracts with the architects were structured in such a way that he didn’t have to seek commission approval for the spending or notify commissioners.

The county paid for each study on a caseby-case basis, as well as the extra hours racked up investigating options the school board hadn’t approved. So although the total cost of all the studies exceeded the \$50,000 threshold requiring commission approval, each individual study fell below the

\$25,000 threshold requiring Wamp to notify the commission of the expenditures.

For example, the Gateway study — which examined multiple options beyond what the school board approved — cost \$21,000, according to the original purchase order.

The Hamilton County school board didn't see any of the predesign reports funded and shaped under the umbrella of county government over the spring and summer until last week, when Hamilton County Superintendent Justin Robertson asked the school board to rethink its No. 1 priority.

Now, Robertson is advocating that CCA stay on Dallas Road and that the board vote in November to approve a \$15 million career and technical training program at the Gateway site — similar to the Harrison Bay Future Ready Center — a plan that would use only part of the building that was purchased by the county for \$10 million in 2023.

If \$83 million of the bond passed by the commission is spent at Gateway, there won't be enough money to address all five priority projects identified by the school board in January, Robertson told the Times Fress Press by phone.

Along with the Gateway project, building onto Clifton Hills Elementary on its current site, rebuilding Soddy Daisy Middle on its current site, consolidating Rivermont, DuPont and Alpine Crest to build a 600-800 student elementary school and renovating the Brainerd 6-12 campus on its current site were also approved as funding priorities.

“If we spend \$15 million at Gateway, we can get all four of those other projects done,” Robertson said.

The superintendent faced lots of questions, some heated, during his presentation Monday of the school predesign reports, as Tucker McClendon, Wamp's deputy mayor of education and workforce development, who'd been privy to the closely guarded information months ago, watched on.

The reports hadn't been included in the agenda records made publicly available before the meeting, so the public was unaware of the changing

dollar amounts, and McClendon was among the few people in attendance. Two of the four scenarios the county paid an architect to study at the Gateway site looked at creating a brand new high school downtown, a concept that Wamp had wanted but school leaders, like Robertson, opposed. Only the more than \$80 million build-out that incorporated CCA — including the cost of a theater, as well as a \$12 million tech school and \$12 million in updates required by city code — actually looked at using the whole Gateway facility, school board member Ben Connor, D-Chattanooga, said during the meeting, referencing the reports he and the other school board members had just received.

“Just so many questions about why we are moving so quickly in a direction we didn’t vote on,” Connor said.

Why had the county looked at options the board hadn’t approved, and why did estimates put forth by Wamp in August not match the reports in front of them? School board members wanted to know.

In Soddy-Daisy, almost no one wanted to close the middle school to build a middle-high, as a proposal backed by Wamp suggested. So the school board voted in January to rebuild Soddy Daisy Middle on its current site. Still, the county paid a Knoxville architect to estimate the cost of new construction at Soddy Daisy Middle, as well as the construction of a new middle-high.

“I don’t know why 6 to 12 is even being considered,” school board member Steve Slater, R-Soddy-Daisy, told Robertson on Monday.

Clifton Hills Elementary, a school Wamp wanted to close, had been named the No. 2 priority of the school board in January, but the school’s predesign report hadn’t been expedited by the county with the others, records show. School board member Jill Black, D-Lookout Mountain, and others called that concerning.

Robertson said the school’s proximity to a floodplain made the study more challenging.

The 600-800 student elementary school being planned for the DuPont site had been estimated at \$42 million when Wamp went to the commission for

funding, but the study now given to the board showed that estimate has jumped.

“At no point have we estimated that job to be \$50 million,” school board member Joe Smith, R-Hixson, said.

The school may be bigger, Robertson answered him. The Knoxville architectural firm hired by the county to do the predesign report looked at the cost of building an 800- and a 900-student school.

“If we are talking about already going over budget to build a school that we promised parents we didn’t want them to have, a mega school, this light is the smallest of the red flags I am looking at right now,” Connor said.

Robertson said he’d done nothing to mislead the board.

“The reason we started on this is, if we waited for you guys to approve stuff before we took action, we would never get anything done,” he said. “It is our job to do the prework. It still has to come to you for approval, but there are steps before that. It would be unreasonable not to get started.”

“Why wasn’t it brought to us earlier?” Connor asked Robertson.

“We have been working with county government to get to a place,” Robertson answered.

Wamp campaigned on the promise of bringing a vocational high school like the beloved Kirkman High School on Hawk Hill back to downtown Chattanooga. The school, which closed in 1991 to make way for riverfront development as the school system moved toward emphasizing college readiness for all students, trained generations of local tradesmen and women.

Kirkman students spent half of their time learning trades like auto mechanics, electronics, welding, carpentry, commercial art, printing, machining, electricity, refrigeration, chemistry, woodworking, pre-nursing, cosmetology, music, office occupations and homemaking.

Since the closure of Kirkman, the three remaining public high schools in Chattanooga city limits were “either prohibitively selective” or “simply not very good at all,” Wamp wrote in a column while running for county

mayor in 2022, referring to The Howard School and magnet schools CCA and Chattanooga School for the Arts and Sciences.

“We need a big, worldclass, open-enrollment middle and high school near downtown Chattanooga,” he wrote. “This school has been a dream of mine for a decade, going back to the early days of Lamp Post Group when we were starting companies and investing in a generation of new Chattanooga entrepreneurs.”

School board members and county commissioners preferred the idea of expanding the county’s career and technical education, or CTE, programs downtown to make more opportunities accessible to teens from Chattanooga’s high poverty neighborhoods.

And Wamp, with the support of school officials, convinced the county commission to purchase the Gateway campus to that end in June 2023. At the same time, Wamp worked to negotiate funding for the Gateway project into a downtown tax deal. And a school facility task force that Wamp appointed and sat on determined the Gateway project should be a top funding priority for the school board and county commission.

A half-million-dollar expert study commissioned by the school system a few years ago, used by the Wamp task force, had recommended CCA move from its North Chattanooga location to a new facility near downtown theaters and for Normal Park Museum Magnet School to move into CCA’s current space. The shuffle was suggested as a way to shave the school system’s maintenance costs in the coming years.

A document produced by the school system three years ago estimated a new CCA would cost at least \$50 million.

The implications of their final 2023 recommendation — to renovate Gateway into “a flagship campus featuring career and technical education” and “find a new location for CCA” — surprised many.

The new proposal, which didn’t at all resemble the trades-focused Kirkman High School, sought to blend a high performing magnet school with a computer-based career and technical training program, creating a new

downtown high school to be called Chattanooga High School: Center for Creative Arts and High Tech Institute.

School leaders, teachers and parents were skeptical and, in meetings that followed the fall 2023 announcement of the Wamp task force priorities, they said they would not support CCA moving to the Gateway site unless the school was being promised the same or more resources at the new location.

In fact, Connor — one of two school board members with children attending CCA — added an amendment to the facility priorities the school board approved in January, which specified CCA get “an auditorium and Black Box Theater.”

“The vision for the design of Chattanooga High School includes expanded, not limited, access for students in all arts majors,” the amendment passed by the school board in January said.

The magnet school, which requires students to audition to be admitted, is the top-ranked school in Hamilton County, according to U.S. News & World Report, and the eighth best in Tennessee. Robertson has called CCA the best arts school in the entire Southeast.

After the early January vote, Wamp directed architects to determine the costs of the school facility projects approved by the school board, and much more than that.

Robertson, who sat on the task force Wamp appointed, which also included one commissioner and one school board member, said the idea to get pre-design estimates came up in task force conversations, when the construction of Tyner Middle High Academy turned out to be much higher than previously expected. He said he didn’t remember who made the suggestion.

“This is the first time. We have never done predesign work. We always hired an architect and the architect designs it and then we take that out to bid. That is where we ran into the issue with Tyner,” he told the Times Free Press by phone. “This is an additional step that we had not done in the past.”

It was an administrative decision, he said.

“Both bodies were aware, but it didn’t require approval,” Robertson said. He said he told county officials he didn’t want to see the reports until they were done.

The county drove and funded the architectural estimates, saving the school system money, but the move also allowed Wamp and his staff to shape and control the information, the documents show.

Wamp and his staff didn’t want to replicate what CCA already had at the Gateway site, the documents show.

Not long after Wamp’s task force announced its priorities, the county created a new property manager position and hired Michael Kirk, the former operations chief at Boyd Buchanan School, to fill the role.

A little more than a month after the school board approved its school plan, Kirk told the architect hired to study the Gateway campus — Matthew Twitchell, of MTa — that the proposal for studying Gateway might be revised.

“The mayor wants to evaluate the existing CCA program as part of our phase 1 in consideration of how it may/may not fit with a CTE opportunity at Gateway,” Kirk wrote Twitchell on March 4.

When Twitchell visited CCA, he told Principal Jill Levine that Wamp had hired him to assess the costs of renovating the Gateway building to be either CCA or a new technical school or a combination of the two, emails show.

The upstairs areas of the building weren’t suitable for student space, Kirk wrote Wamp on March 14. To turn the building into a full-fledged school would require more than \$10 million in work, just to get it up to code. There were also issues with limited access to natural light, the records show.

Building an auditorium and black-box theater could amount to 40% of the entire renovation cost and would consume a significant number of parking spaces, Kirk wrote Wamp in mid-March. The estimated the cost of the

theater CCA wanted was close to \$1,000 per square foot, according to the records.

“The prospect of a state-of-the-art tech school in the downtown area (the new ‘Kirkman’) seemed to be of significant interest as the acquisition of the Gateway was being considered,” Kirk wrote in mid March.

“It appeared to me that CCA was pushed to the table much later, catching several board members and other stakeholders off guard.”

School leaders weren’t in the loop at this point, according to documents.

“Band-aid is off,” Twitchell wrote Kirk in mid March, after telling Justin Witt, Hamilton County Schools director of maintenance and operations, that he was starting work on the Gateway report and Brainerd/ Dalewood reports. “Who is going to discuss with Justin Robertson?”

Wamp had his own plan, the records show.

He wanted the county to take the lead on some of the school construction projects, though traditionally those were all overseen by the school system. Once the county commission gives funds to the department of education, neither the commission, nor the county mayor has legal authority to direct the use of funds.

Wamp wrote about setting timelines and amending processes with the school board so county government “will be able to pursue a design build process if we so choose on one or more of these projects.”

Wamp’s grandfather, Don Wamp, a well known local architect who’d designed Hamilton County schools, had been one of the last local architects able to bring a school project in on budget, Weston Wamp told the Times Free Press after the bond passed. With the “historic” funds approved, he said, he wanted to make sure there was good stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

Robertson told school board members Monday that the school system had signed a memorandum of understanding giving county government the reins on several projects. The memo was never authorized by the commission in the form of a resolution, and the mayor does not have unilateral authority to bind the county in such an agreement.

At the same meeting, Robertson advocated for the board to approve a new process that would take county government out of the driver's seat and move oversight back to the school system.

Wamp wanted Twitchell's Gateway report by the end of April, and the architect delivered. Wamp and his staff — who met and emailed one another about editing Twitchell's report — were reviewing a second draft by May 2, the records show.

Was CCA going to go to Gateway, or not? Wamp's staff asked in May.

"If CCA is out, we have options," Kirk wrote Twitchell, explaining the different scenarios the architect might explore in his report that didn't give CCA "all proposed facility resources."

The cost of the county's architectural payouts were piling up.

Kirk needed to pay Twitchell for additional work he'd been asked to do.

"Is there any grant money available to cover or offset some of that or any additional cost?" Kirk wrote McClendon on May 9.

"I'm not sure what you mean by grant funding?" McClendon wrote back.

"Do we need to move funds around to cover this for your department?"

And the county staff did move money around, records show.

"We can direct pay," Todd Leamon, the county's public works director, told Kirk.

Finance cut the public works administration budget "by the \$120,000 I transferred in this year's budget," Leamon wrote and cut budgeted increases in Kirk's departments. "Finishing out this budget and after July 1, we'll have to require departments/agencies/offices to provide account codes to move forward with these types of cost requests."

Twitchell's final report, dated May 28, listed four scenarios for the Gateway campus.

Minimal work for a technical school on the first level would cost \$12.6 million, the Gateway Facilities Report said.

The cost of following through with what the school board passed in January: \$82.2 million, according to the report, which included a theater for CCA estimated at \$20 million.

“The production theater is significantly more expensive than any surrounding ‘educational’ construction and has been tallied separately for transparency,” the architect’s report, edited by Wamp and his staff, said. “The CCA request for this program element includes a full working stage with curtains and rigging, an acoustic shell and acoustical clouds, and an orchestra pit with pit fillers allowing the stage to be extended.”

Two other scenarios estimated the cost of creating a new high school downtown, as Wamp had wanted.

The first, with a gym space for physical education but not competitive sports, was priced at \$58.6 million. The second, an 800-student school with trade-type electives on the lower level, was priced at \$43.7 million, the report showed.

More than two months after the Gateway report was finalized, Wamp and Robertson went to the commission and asked for passage of a \$260 million bond to fund the projects the school board approved in January, the largest in county history.

The mayor went an extra step to illustrate his transparency, Wamp said at the time, by giving commissioners an outline, just before the vote, showing the estimated cost of every project the bond would fund.

Seated alongside his fellow commissioners, Sharpe questioned the numbers presented by Wamp on the day of the vote.

But Robertson reminded the commission, which has to approve every bond dollar spent, that in previous years the priorities of bond spending “shifted dramatically.” Not all the projects will get done with the latest bond issue, he told commissioners in August.

“There is some risk inherent in outlining it because we can’t be exact,” Wamp told commissioners the day they voted. “There will be some people that hold us to these numbers, which is impossible.

“We’re just trying to come to the commission and the public, the school board and other stakeholders, saying here is our best estimate based on, in this case a lot of work on the school system’s side and public works over here, it’s our best estimate of where we will invest these dollars.”

Five years ago, the school system had put together a plan, which cost a half a million dollars and was developed with a full year of public input, and that plan had been guiding school construction and closure decisions until 2022, Sharpe told the Times Free Press on Saturday.

And after collecting more community feedback, the school board decided this year to keep county schools on track with that plan, he said, not follow the recommendations of a Wampappointed task force.

“Wamp is interested in one thing — his future in politics,” Sharpe said.

“And by using our community as a stepping stone, our students will pay the price.”