

**13-Dec-2007 - Clinch Valley Times:**

**"Council, Mayor join unified effort to preserve SPHS"**

*The following first appeared in the Dec 13, 2007 edition of the Clinch Valley Times.*

Following a presentation by Debbie Baca and Allyson Sutherland, both St. Paul residents and St. Paul High School graduates, the St. Paul Town Council and Mayor approved a motion to join the unified effort initiated by the SPHS Alumni Association's "Voice For Community Schools."

Baca, whose two daughters are both St. Paul High School graduates, outlined the five options which the present Wise County School Board will present to the new board after the first of the year. They include

- Consolidate into one high school
- Consolidate into two high schools
- Consolidate into three high schools
- Renovate all six high schools
- Replace three schools (Powell Valley, J. J. Kelly, and Coeburn), renovate two (Pound and Appalachia), and leave St. Paul alone, to be dealt with later using normal capital outlay funds.

"Voice for Community Schools" supports the fifth option.

She pointed out the impact that losing a school would have on St. Paul or any other small town - it's economy, housing, employment, and community development. "We need to be concerned about our town and about the quality of education our kids will receive," she said. She told the Council she has learned that after the disaster at Columbine High School in Colorado, United States Secretary of Education Riley appointed a committee to explore ways to avoid another such terrible incident. The committee's report, made several months later, was simply "Reduce the size of the schools." A school of 900 has an 825 percent higher chance of such a violent incident than a school of 300, they reported.

She asked that Council approve a motion to support the effort to keep our schools open, and invited Council members and the Mayor to the next meeting of "Voice for Community Schools." It will be held Thursday, January 10, at 6:30 p.m. in the St. Paul Town Hall. Everyone in the community is invited to attend this meeting.

Allyson Sutherland, a Wise County teacher whose older son will be attending kindergarten next fall, told the Council and Mayor that she has taught in schools across the county, and added, "St. Paul has something special. The learning environment is unique - the attention each student receives from the faculty, extracurricular activities, and emphasis on education." She said, "I want my children to have the same opportunity as I had."

Mayor Jack Kiser, commenting that we will have a "new" Board of Supervisors and School Board in 2008, suggested that the group invite members of both Boards to the January 10 meeting. He mentioned that he, his wife and their children have graduated from SPHS, and that he has grandchildren in the schools. "I'm willing to go to meetings, and am sure others on the Council will go, too."

Council member Blake Whitenack moved to adopt the motion suggested by Debbie Baca, and Councilman Harry Kelly amended it to include support of Option #5. All members voted in favor of the motion.

Present for the meeting were Council members Jim Short, Harry Kelly, Rita McReynolds, Blake Whitenack and Steve Stewart; Mayor Jack Kiser; Acting Treasurer Glenda Lane; Town Attorney Ben Chafin; and several spectators.