

## NEWS


[HOME](#) / [NEWS](#) / [LOCAL](#) / [EDUCATION](#) /

## Dickenson County School Board moves forward with consolidation

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

By [DEBRA MCCOWN](#)

Published: October 05, 2010

 vote  
now

**CLINTWOOD, Va.** -- CLINTWOOD, Va. – With a 5-0 vote late Tuesday, the Dickenson County School Board voted to move forward with its plan for school consolidation.

The plan is to replace the county's three high schools with a single new high school and build a new technical school and middle school on the same site. A new elementary school, consolidating two existing schools, is to be built on a separate site.

The cost of the plan would be covered by \$102 million from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that has been designated for flood-proofing efforts. The board's vote Tuesday excluded any decisions to proceed on a particular site.

Several people attending the meeting spoke in favor of the proposal, citing as reasons to go forward the old buildings and a school system that lacks specific courses and educational programs.

While only a handful spoke against consolidation, many discussed the ethics of using eminent domain to take land for the project. Among them were the owners of the site identified for a new high school, technical school and middle school on Rose Ridge, who reiterated Tuesday that they are not interested in selling the property.

"We do not wish to give up our home and property," said Gladys Counts, who has lived there for more than half a century. "We're too old to move."

She said she's 73 and her husband, Kay, is 81, and they'd planned to live out their lives and be buried there. They are among 16 families that could be affected by the school-building project.

Other Rose Ridge residents also spoke, some for and some against the proposal, some offering their property in the name of progress and others speaking of the emotional distress the issue has caused.

The Counts were represented by Norfolk attorney Henry Howell, who promised a court battle and national attention for the case if the county tries to take the land.

"I've never seen such a blatant collusion," said Howell, who claims county officials chose the site because coal company Alpha Natural Resources, which owns minerals in the area, supported using it instead of another, preferred site.

A spokesman for Alpha was not immediately reached for comment Tuesday night.

Lawyers for the school board and county Industrial Development Authority, the targets of Howell's animated speech, called the allegations absurd.

"We don't understand how we could be conspiring because we don't want [the coal] and Alpha's already got the right to mine it," said Scott Mullins, the school board attorney.

Mullins also said the school board opposes the use of eminent domain to acquire the land and views it as a last resort.

Instead, he said, the plan is to get the help of architects and engineers to draw options for how the schools could fit on the property, then present these options to the public in a month or so to determine which is the best fit that displaces the fewest people.

Jewell Askins, school board chairwoman, said Tuesday's vote was a step toward building not just bricks and mortar, but a quality education system for the future.

"Obviously this means really big changes for the Dickenson County school system," Askins said. "I think for those of us that fear change, we're quaking in our shoes right now. For those that look at it as an opportunity for a better tomorrow, we're really optimistic."

ADVERTISEMENT



**DealTaker.com**  
great deals on christmas sales

**KEWLBOX.COM**  
Games, Puzzles & Trivia




**blockdot**  
Advergaming and Branded Media

**TriCities.com** ©2010 Media General Communications Holdings, LLC. A [Media General](#) company. [Terms and Conditions](#) | [Work With Us](#)

**TriCities.com:** [Suggestions/Comments](#) | [Email Alerts](#) | [SMS/Text Alerts](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [Site Search](#) | [FCC/EEO Report](#) | [Closed Captioning](#) | [Become A Carrier](#)

**Partners:** [Bristol Herald Courier](#) | [11 Connects](#) | [SWVAToday.com](#)

**Regional Partner Links:** [Morganton News Herald](#) | [McDowell News](#) | [Winston-Salem Journal](#) | [WSLS Roanoke](#) | [Lynchburg News & Advance](#) | [Richmond Times Dispatch](#) | [headlineVA](#)

 Calais - Powered by Thomson Reuters