



James Blair Repurposing **UPDATE**

July 26, 2010

Vol. 6

At its July 21, 2009, meeting, the W-JCC School Board voted to approve \$2.9 million to convert James Blair Middle School to a new home for the Academy for Life and Learning (A.L.L.) and administrative offices for Student Services, Human Resources, Finance, Academic Services, Multicultural Affairs, Communications, and Superintendent's Office to be ready for the start of the 2010-2011 school year.

This decision followed many months of community discussion regarding this issue. Excellent, thoughtful arguments for and against the proposal to reconfigure this historic building were brought forth and debated.

This update provides a place where citizens can go for the most up-to-date information about the James Blair repurposing project. It contains information about project cost, intended uses for the building, and plans for its future to ensure that the public is receiving "up to the minute" information. It also will address questions and rumors W-JCC staff is hearing in the community in an effort to confirm what is true and correct what is not. You will find straightforward, easy-to-understand answers to questions we are being asked, and that we are hearing being asked in community.

We hope this is helpful as we progress through the James Blair repurposing process.

Greg Davy, W-JCC Communications Specialist
253-6759

(Most recent items in green.)

■ The process of converting the existing annex space to a combination of offices, support space and classrooms for the ALL program has begun. Two classrooms, that were separated by a moveable partition, are being converted to office space. There will be nine regular classrooms.

■ **Question: When will the repurposing for the ALL Academy be complete? When will move-in occur?** Final completion of the annex is scheduled for Aug. 31. However, staff should be able to access and start setting up August 12.

■ Conversion of the main school building into central office is scheduled for completion by early 2011, and the project is on schedule. The main emphasis right now is on the annex, but work on the main building will continue throughout the summer and pick up once school starts and the annex work is completed.

■ The Contractor, United General Contractors, began work the week of June 21, 2010. Work has concentrated on the annex, which will host the ALL Program (Academy for Life and Learning). Work includes converting space for both classroom and administrative uses and the installation of a new HVAC system. The ALL Program will have use of the media center and cafeteria. The final completion for this portion of the project is Sept. 1, 2010. ALL will move into the annex from trailers at Eastern State.

■ The contractor has removed all old tile, damaged cabinetry and other items that will be replaced. HVAC ductwork is being installed throughout the annex in preparation for the new HVAC system, scheduled to arrive by July 12. Other work in this area includes installing new drywall, painting, tile and carpet.

In the main building, work consists of converting classroom space into administrative offices, including new paint, carpet and tile. The main section also will have a new HVAC system. Finance, Human Resources and Student Services will be on the first floor. Records Management and parts of Technology will be in the renovated band and choir areas. Academic Services, Superintendent's office, Communications, School Board, Parent Center and the remainder of Student Services will be on the second floor. The gym and auditorium will continue to be available for community use. This portion of the school is scheduled for final completion on or before February 1, 2011.

During this same time period, the school's custodial and maintenance staffs have been busy removing furniture from every classroom and marking for transfer to Hornsby Middle School, for use at other schools, for sale or disposal.

Biweekly progress meetings are held onsite with the contractor, architect (RRMM, Chesapeake) and WJCC facilities manager.

■ There were a number of inaccuracies and misleading statements in the *Virginia Gazette* article of Saturday, Jan. 16, 2010, headlined "Blair conversion is \$2 million short." Following is a summary of the inaccuracies, along with the correct information.

Headline: "Blair conversion is \$2 million short"

The headline is not true. The funds for the James Blair repurposing project have been identified from within existing projects.

Subhead: "May delay Hornsby and keep status quo"

This statement is not true. What the Division is doing with Blair is unrelated to any decision about whether or not to delay the opening of Hornsby Middle School. The funds identified for the Blair project actually come from surplus dollars on the two new schools, as well as a number of other existing CIP projects. Using these funds would in no way negatively affect the opening of Hornsby.

“What’s lacking is money to do the job.”

This statement is not true. As noted above, these funds were identified from within existing projects.

“Yet none of the money was in hand, and most of it isn’t available now.”

This statement is not true. As W-JCC Assistant Superintendent for Operations Dr. Robert Becker earlier noted, the money for the James Blair refurbishment and HVAC projects was indeed in the Capital Improvement Plan since last year. The only caveat is that the money had not yet been appropriated by the governing bodies. Since last June, the staff has identified the necessary funds needed for the Blair project from within existing, appropriated projects.

“But lack of funding could scuttle the entire project, as could delaying the opening of Hornsby Middle School.”

Statement is not true. The Division has identified funding for the Blair project from within existing funds; therefore lack of funding is not an issue.

“...but the extra \$2 million has to be found in the upcoming budget.”

Statement is not true. Funds have been identified from existing CIP projects.

- The architects have met with the Academy for Life and Learning (ALL) staff on several occasions this fall. The team is close to finalizing selections for new paint, tile and carpet.

- On Nov. 10, 2009, the School Board awarded a contract to RRMM Architects of Virginia Beach to complete the design for the conversion and refurbishment of the main building. With this action, RRMM is now working on both the annex for ALL and the main building for office space. This combination of services will allow for savings as we complete the designs and get ready to bid both projects together next spring.

- The division has submitted an application for a QSCB School Energy Project to VDOE to fully fund a geothermal HVAC system for Blair. We should hear back from the State this winter.

- **Question: Has all asbestos been removed from the James Blair building?** To the

best of our knowledge, all asbestos has been removed from Blair except for that related to original floor tiles. Most of these were removed in previous refurbishment projects. However, it is possible we might encounter those tiles when/if we move any original cabinetry. Should we encounter any of those tiles, the consultant and removal fees would be covered in the project contingency funds. We won't know for sure what we face until we get to that stage.

■ **Update on the Academy for Life and Learning (ALL):** W-JCC plans to treat the ALL/Annex as a virtual 2nd project, separate from the main office building conversion. The ALL staff will be able to select different colors, different carpet, etc., from the main office area, in an effort to help develop a separate identity. The products will be in the same product line, to help save funds with larger scale purchasing, but it will allow flexibility.

■ **The cost to reconfigure James Blair Middle School into administrative offices and classroom space for the Academy for Life and Learning is \$2.9 million.** This money will be taken from Capital Improvement Project (CIP) funds that are to be used specifically for improvements, renovations and remodeling of existing buildings. This money is NOT being taken from Operating Funds which support students and schools.

■ **The \$2.9 million is far less than what it would cost to build a new building complex that would house W-JCC administration and the A.L.L. Academy.** The estimated cost of building a new administration building capable also of housing the ALL program is \$5.4 million. Consolidating Central Office functions into a single building also will result in a savings of \$150,000 a year in rental and utility costs now being paid to house the Student Services Department and the A.L.L. Academy.

■ **The leader of the A.L.L. program was closely consulted during the proposal to house the program at James Blair, and he enthusiastically endorsed using the annex building at James Blair for this purpose.** The annex wing on the James Blair campus is ideally suited to the current needs of the Academy: It will provide eight spacious classrooms, the newest and largest on the James Blair campus, complete with science labs, the latest instructional technology, rest room facilities, meeting space, and an office for A.L.L. administration, in a private location that can be devoted strictly to the unique needs of an alternative education program. It is located just steps away from a library/media center, cafeteria, and gymnasium, none of which is available in the Academy's current location on the Eastern State Hospital grounds.

■ **Current enrollment trends show that the current three middle schools (Toano, James Blair and Berkeley) will be OVER CAPACITY by 89 students at the start of the 2010-11 school year.** Given this reality, the School Board chose to take advantage of a very favorable construction bidding climate and approve the construction of a new middle school and elementary school complex on Jolly Pond Road in the northern end of James City County. The cost of this project was \$8.5 million UNDER the original estimates, due to the weakened economy. Berkeley, Toano and Hornsby middle schools will be able to accommodate the projected growth through at least the 2013-14 school year.

■ **No one is certain when James Blair will be converted back to a middle school -- but the planned conversion will make it easy to do so when the time comes.** When James Blair becomes a middle school again depends mostly on how many students participate in the Academy for Life and Learning program in the coming years. The best estimate we have now -- and it is strictly an educated guess -- is that a fourth middle school would be needed between six and 10 years from now. When the time comes to bring students back to James Blair, it will be a relatively easy, low-cost matter to remove the walls and partitions that are planned for administrative offices. While operating Toano, Berkeley, and Lois S. Hornsby Middle Schools over the next 6 to 10 years, the savings to the school division in operating costs is an estimated \$1.8 million annually, or \$10.8 million over six years or \$18 million over the next 10 years.

#