

Thank you Mr. Chairman, members, of the Board, Mr. Lynch, Central Office staff.

I rise tonight to congratulate this Board, Mr. Lynch, and his leadership team on nailing down the \$62 million grant to be used towards the construction of a new Franklin High School — a project that is sorely needed and long overdue.

I recall sitting across the hall in 2001 in a meeting room that has now been subdivided into smaller rooms. We came together under then Superintendent Lonnie Crawford's leadership to discuss the expansion of FHS and replacement of several of the existing buildings. While the Board was able to shepherd through the construction of four new elementary schools, the FHS project seemed to be always just out of reach. But thanks to your efforts, the leadership of county commissioner chairman Gary Shields, commissioners Josh Young and Danny Antoine, and so many others, that dream is becoming a reality.

Again, congratulations.

And now, like my favorite TV detective Lt. Columbo would say, "just one more thing."

And I say that with humor and I say it with sobriety, because frequently in public education, as in so much in life, if we didn't laugh, we would cry. Humour plays so much of a role in getting us through the day, the week, our lives. Stark sobriety because it seems that public education is the essential safety net for a student population in increasing need of a safety net — our list of essential tasks always seems to grow and never seems to shrink.

The "just one more thing" I bring to your attention tonight is the issue of affordable housing.

I wonder tonight as we move forward with the building of this new high school whether we will be able to adequately staff it when it opens in three to four years. It is no secret that the NC teacher pipeline has been decimated. And it is no secret that housing costs have shot up in Western North Carolina, in Macon County. What counts as "affordable housing" in Highlands is a single wide mobile home, two small bedrooms, two small bathrooms, for \$1,800 a month. We have just witnessed a motel on the Georgia Road undergo a remodel so motel rooms with a kitchenette go for \$900 a month.

How will we recruit young families to teach here in three to four years when the new school opens?

I recently attended a meeting held by the Franklin Town Council held jointly with part of the NC Institute of Government with a focus on affordable housing in our community.

I just learned that Pyramid Healthcare out of Ducansville, Penn, a mental health provider, was looking at our community to locate one of their facilities. We all acknowledge the dire need for more mental providers in our community. And we just missed making the cut for where they

might locate and the factor they cited as having a major role in their decision was lack of affordable housing for their employees.

What I am suggesting tonight is that this Board consider a delegate to a what could be a committee of town board members of Highlands and Franklin, a representative of the Nantahala community, a delegate from the county commissioners who could all work together on developing a vision and a plan for more affordable housing for teachers, for first responders, for county and town employees, because considering the skyrocketing prices of housing in Macon County, I have no idea where those people are going to live, and I want the accomplishment of finally achieving the financial commitment to build the new high school to bloom in all of its potential glory by all of us paying attention to the essential other half of the equation for the new school's success — the people who will teach and work there.