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### **Not as “New” as You May Think**

Most of you probably try to keep up with birthdays and anniversaries--sometimes I forget. Last year, for example, Salem High School turned 30 years old. SHS opened for the first time in the fall of 1976 (for the 1976-1977 school year) and the only commemoration I participated in was a facility study recommending (among other things) the repair of a cracked parapet wall.

In the minds of many Salemites, Salem High School is still “the new high school.” Given the long and rich history of Andrew Lewis High School and the numerous proud graduates who remain dedicated supporters of teaching and learning in Salem, the perception is understandable.

Another reason people may not realize the age of our school buildings is because of the leadership and resources provided by the City Council and Administration and the stewardship of the School Board and School Administration. Our schools are clean and necessary repairs are made on an ongoing basis.

Comprehensive and high quality renovations and additions were made to G.W. Carver Elementary School (1997) and Andrew Lewis Middle School (2005). Both schools are sources of Salem pride because of the commitment to excellence that guided both projects. Both buildings are efficient and designed to provide our children with world class education for decades.

Shortly after the completion of the Andrew Lewis project, the School Board completed an objective and comprehensive review of the buildings and mechanical systems at Salem High School, East, South, and West Salem elementary schools to guide capital planning and assess the extent those schools can support education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The current condition report affirmed that with the input of the principals and the direction of Assistant Superintendent, Mr. Michael A. Bryant, our school custodians and city maintenance crews do a commendable job caring for the facilities. Recommendations from the study documented the need for additional classrooms, improvement of existing spaces, and modernizing mechanical systems (HVAC, lighting, etc.).

Just as homeowners keep a watchful eye on an aging furnace to ensure that it keeps running through the winter and that the cost of operation remains manageable, the study revealed that mechanical systems at “the new high school” have exceeded their expected life and more efficient technologies are available. The original coal-fired boilers (though retrofitted with gas burners) still in service at multiple elementary schools have lasted longer than expected and are inefficient.

Where the need for additions and renovations were identified, the study addressed four key areas:

### **1. Teaching and Learning**

The study was firmly grounded in instruction--the core of all that we do in Salem City Schools. The educational plan was updated for each school before thought was given to what new spaces may be needed.

### **2. Safety and Security**

Regrettably, new risks face schools today that were not part of the original architectural designs. Everything from improved traffic patterns to enhanced visibility and supervision of entrances and corridors were addressed.

### **3. Students with Special Needs**

Appropriate education of students with special needs requires specialized, space-intensive services and technologies.

### **4. Community Connections**

Preliminary concepts from the study emphasize facility availability of each school to the larger community by locating libraries, cafeterias, and gymnasiums in areas that enhance evening and weekend use by the communities they serve.

Ultimately, the facility study was both affirming of the manner in which our schools have been maintained and unsettling in documenting that four of our six schools do not have the instructional space necessary to support a 21<sup>st</sup> Century educational program and depend on inefficient mechanical systems that will require repair on an ever-increasing basis.

The School Board's facility study was technical, but the message to citizens is rather straightforward. Well done so far Salem, but resolve that no matter where in Salem a child may live, every student will continue to have the opportunity to attend school in buildings that support teaching and learning for generations to come.