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Once In A Lifetime Chance

A detailed survey report has been filed with the State Board of Education to support Burke County's application for a comprehensive community college.

This means that a decision should be made soon as to whether Burke will be given or denied approval to build one of the five such institutions which will be authorized during the current two-year period.

A drive-in or commuting college has obvious appeal. Its two-year academic course, accredited and equal in quality to that offered in any of the State supported colleges or universities; its two-year course in the technologies, such as that offered in a technical institute; its one-year trade or vocational courses, comparable to the State's industrial education centers; its short courses and adult classes—all these add up to a something-for-everybody approach to education beyond the high school.

The proposal for a community college seems at this point to have virtually unanimous public approval. There is no organized opposition, although the subject has been under discussion for nearly two years. One reason is that, apart from its educational and cultural influence through the years, it would be an economic bargain. Burke County would make an investment in building the facility itself and pay a portion—15 per cent or less—of operating expenses annually. It would require a bond issue of up to \$1,000,000, but the State has approved a contingency appropriation which could allot up to \$500,000 for construction costs.

A million dollar bond issue—with the likelihood that only a half-million would be required—would be at stake in a special election which would be called if the State Board of Education approves. A second decision would be a proposal to authorize up to five cents in the county tax levy for operating the college, although approximately one-half that rate would be sufficient to produce the estimated \$35,000 to \$50,000 county share until the enrollment grows substantially. And it's entirely possible that growth in assessed valuation through addition of new industry and other property on the tax scroll would be sufficient to produce the needed revenue without raising the tax rate.

It should be remembered that for each 15 cents or less spent by Burke County the State and tuition fees would furnish 85 cents or more, which would be infused into the local economy.

It's natural that some people will come forward to ask whether Burke might wait to push for the college until it has improved the public schools. Such a question reflects great local interest in our schools.

The answer is that public school improvement can be and should be made on a continuing basis. But obtaining a community college is a once-in-a-lifetime matter. If Burke County does not get a college now, it's possible that none would be established here during the present generation, if at all. It's unlikely that Burke County could wait five years and then expect to get a college, especially if one is established now in an adjoining county.

This gives the college plan a now-or-never air, while schools and other county services can present their needs annually.

Burke County must move forward on all fronts—public education, health, economically, industrially and other phases of life. None should be neglected.

Progress in many of these can come gradually, a step at a time. But the community college proposal is a step which must be taken when there is opportunity and that means when the State Board of Education gives its approval. It is a giant stride in importance, although relatively small in cost when compared with long-range school programs, for example.

If Burke County is given the chance for a college, the opportunity should be seized overwhelmingly and enthusiastically. There should be no reservations or doubts.

A community college, whenever established, would be a crowning resource in a county which is well able to move forward in all fields provided it has the vision and will to grasp opportunity.