

Windsor, North Carolina
October 5, 2015
Regular Meeting

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners met for their regularly scheduled meeting at 4:00pm at 106 Dundee Street, Windsor, NC. The following members were present or absent:

Present: Ronald "Ron" Wesson, District I
Stewart White, District II
Tammy A. Lee, District III
John Trent, District IV
Ernestine (Byrd) Bazemore, District V

Absent: None

Staff Present: County Manager Scott Sauer
Clerk to the Board Sarah S. Tinkham
County Attorney Lloyd Smith
Finance Officer William Roberson
Network Systems Administrator Joe Wilkes
Emergency Services Director Mitch Cooper
Cooperative Extension Director Richard Rhodes
Register of Deeds Annie Wilson
Sheriff John Holley
Parks & Recreation Director Donna Mizelle

Gene Motley of the Roanoke-Chowan News Herald and Barry Ward of the Bertie-Ledger Advance were present from the media.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Wesson called the meeting to order, and thanked those present for their attendance.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice Chairman Lee led the Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Tonza Ruffin Buffalo, Founder of Esquires for Education in Bertie County, approached the Board with a statement regarding recent news articles that have been printed about a recent decision by the Board to fund her organization.

Ms. Buffalo thanked the Board for their contribution, and also provided clarification about her organization's mission and goals.

She urged the Board to continue to pursue ways to bridge the gap for African American young men as doing so will build stronger communities, and provide an even playing field in regards to education and delinquency prevention.

Mike Hoggard of Windsor approached the Board with a concern that was raised to him about a fellow citizen. This citizen, James Barnes, recently requested that water bills for his newly purchased property be switched over into his name. Upon doing so, he was told that there was a \$1,050 fee to cover the cost of the previous owner who had a prior water balance.

On behalf of Mr. Barnes, Mr. Hoggard asked the Commissioners if there was any type of compromise available as he did not think it was fair to penalize the new owner for a previous owner's debt.

After insight was received from County Attorney Smith, and a brief discussion by the Board, the Board came to a consensus to have the new owner simply pay the \$100 transfer fee and \$50 deposit.

The Board instructed the County Manager and County Attorney to review the current Water Department policies and to make recommendations to prevent this type of issue from occurring in the future.

APPOINTMENTS

Emergency Services Director, Mitch Cooper – present post-storm evaluation

Emergency Services Director, Mitch Cooper, discussed the current state of the County's lowest lying areas in Windsor due to the recent periods of heavy and excessive rain.

Mr. Cooper thanked the Board for their support over the last week in preparation for this weather event as well as the urgent call to action in preparation for the storm that the County thankfully missed, Hurricane Joaquin.

He stated that he was working very closely with the State as well as the American Red Cross and others to have sand bags, ice trucks, cases of bottled water, and other needed supplies available to the County in the event of a major weather event.

As of this meeting, Mr. Cooper reported of only one road closure, and that due to rain totals being less than expected, there was no significant flooding in the lowest lying areas of Windsor.

He reported that any high water levels should recede in the coming days, and that a lack of down trees has prevented power outages in the area. Only a few down trees had been reported.

The Board commended Mr. Cooper for his efforts.

Board of Elections Update – review of proposed 2016 primary election dates and revised filing period, plus reminder of pending municipal elections by Carol Woodard, Chair, Board of Elections

Carol Woodard, Chair of the Board of Elections, and Michael Freeman, Board member, were present to provide the Board of Commissioners with an update about the latest schedule for one-stop voting in the upcoming municipal elections. An attachment was given to the Board in their board package that also listed the 2016 primary dates.

One-stop voting will run from October 22nd thru October 31st and will only be available in the Towns of Windsor, Aulander, and Powellsville.

Chairman Wesson asked Ms. Woodard to clarify the need, if any, for citizens to provide ID when checking into vote at their polling locations.

Mr. Woodard stated that the new voter ID law would not come into effect until 2016, so this year's elections do not require a voter ID card. However, attendants at each polling station would be asking citizens if they had ID already in preparation for 2016 elections. Information would be provided to any citizens about how to obtain an ID if they are in need of one.

An excerpt from House Bill 373 is below:

House Bill 373

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- Reduces the time that a candidate must be affiliated with a political party before filing as a candidate in a party primary for that party from 90 days to 75 days.
- Moves the filing period from noon on the second Monday in February through noon on the last business day in February to noon on Tuesday, December 1, 2015, through noon on Monday, December 21, 2015.
- Requires a candidate's statement of economic interest to be filed with the State Ethics Commission by February 1, 2016.
- Requires that the first quarter campaign finance reports are due Monday, March 7, 2016, and include the period through February 29, 2016 and that the report for the second quarter also covers March 2016.

Additionally, Ms. Woodard provided a brief update to the Board regarding the need for County funding to replace voting equipment in the near future.

Michael Freeman responded by stating that the situation with the State regarding the replacement of outdated voting equipment was still a “fluid situation,” and that the Board of Elections would provide more information to the Commissioner as soon as it is obtained from the State.

Agency program update by Teresa Cole, Director of the Albemarle Regional Library System

Due to scheduling conflicts, Teresa Cole was unable to attend this meeting as scheduled, and was rescheduled to another Board meeting.

Agency program update by Bobby Williams, Site Manager of the Historic Hope Foundation

Bobby Williams, Site Manager of the Historic Hope Foundation, provided an update to the Board about the latest events that the Hope Plantation is due to host.

Mr. Williams announced that the Foundation would be hosting another “History Day” event for local area students. Last year, the event attracted 400 students. This year it is expected to attract 600-800 students to the area with their teachers and parents.

He discussed various tours of the Hope Plantation that will be hosted in the month of October including schools from the County, Greenville, and Charlotte, NC.

Mr. Williams announced a new event that would begin this year called the “Halloween Harvest Festival” which will be held on Saturday, October 17th from 6:00-8:30PM. The event is geared towards youth 12 and under.

Additionally, on Sunday, December 6th, the Hope Plantation will be hosting a Holiday Open House where students and their families may attend to see the historic home decorated in time period decorations, as well as play period specific games, and shop for historic crafts and gifts.

Mr. Williams thanked the Board for their continued financial support and stated that his number one priority as the Site Manager was to bring as much history as possible to the youth of North Carolina.

The Board commended Mr. Williams for his efforts and has been very impressed with Mr. Williams’s efforts in always working to ensure enough educational opportunities for the citizens of Bertie County.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Latest Board vacancy advertisement in Bertie-Ledger Advance

This item is purely informational, and the advertisements show of all of the County’s’ latest board, committee, and commission openings.

The Clerk to the Board, Sarah S. Tinkham, is required to advertise these openings every six months.

Jury Commission

County Manager Sauer noted that there was a vacancy on the Jury Commission, and requested that the Board reach out to their communities for a new representative for the County as the previous member has resigned from his post on that commission.

Planning Board

Commissioner Trent made a **MOTION** to reappoint Terry Pratt to the Planning Board. Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

Chairman Wesson reiterated a new protocol for consideration of consent agenda items, many of which are administrative in nature and have been previously discussed or approved at a previous meeting.

Chairman Wesson made a **MOTION** to approve the Consent Agenda items collectively below as presented. Vice Chairman Lee **SECONDED** the motion with the recommendation that the draft minutes from September 21, 2015 be revisited in order to remove a paragraph regarding Vice Chairman Lee being given the opportunity to change her vote about the non-profit, Esquires for Education. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

1. **Fees Report** – Register of Deeds – September 2015
2. **Minutes** for Work Session 9-21-15, Regular Session 9-21-15, and Joint Meeting 9-24-15
3. **Rural Operating Assistance Program (ROAP) documents** for FY 2015-2016

DISCUSSION

Sheriff's Department – a) Part-time pay proposal to establish hourly rate of \$15.00, b) relocation update

Sheriff John Holley was present to request that the Board approve his recommendation to increase the salary for all current and future part-time deputies from \$12 per hour to \$15 per hour.

He stated that the increase will help the County maintain the most qualified deputies on staff while still competing with other local area agencies.

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to approve the request as presented and to increase part-time salary pay for deputies from \$12 to \$15. Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Sheriff Holley also briefly updated the Board on the Sheriff's Office relocation project. Mr. Holley stated that the relocation has been a "journey, and that the journey continues." He stated that the move is a step in the right direction, and that the logistics of the building are currently being finalized.

County Manager Sauer stated that as of tonight's meeting, fiber lines were being installed to the recently implanted underground, conduit tubing.

Vice Chairman Lee requested an update about the electronic monitoring program.

County Attorney Smith stated that he had been making various calls to the company, Corrisoft, LLC, but as of tonight's meeting, none have been returned.

Cooperative Extension staffing continuity recommendation and salary funding formula for pro-rated annual across the board increases and longevity pay

County Manager Sauer briefly discussed the salaries of Cooperative Extension employees in regards to where the funding is received from NC State University and NC A&T State University with a shared portion being paid by the County.

He also described the need to formally incorporate the Cooperative Extension Department more as a member in the Bertie County organization as the County utilizes the expertise of the Department, and its current Director, Richard Rhodes, and a very regular basis for County matters.

For those reasons, County Manager Sauer recommended that the Board approve the staffing continuity and salary funding formula for pro-rated annual across the board increases and longevity pay for all Cooperative Extension employees which is consistent with the State's core staffing plan.

County Manager Sauer also asked the Board to authorize the Department to extend the part-time employment contract for Ms. Belinda Belch through the end of 2015 in order to prep the Department for the impending departure of Director Rhodes.

He stated that he was confident that the cost to maintain Ms. Belch as well as to provide the funding needed to cover the pro-rated increases to the Department could be absorbed within the existing budget due to Mr. Rhodes retirement.

At this time, Cooperative Extension Director, Richard Rhodes, officially announced his plans to retire from the Department on December 31, 2015. Mr. Rhodes thanked the Board and the County Manager for all of their support over the years, and stated that he was thankful for his time spent at the County.

The Board congratulated Mr. Rhodes and after a brief discussion, Commissioner Bazemore made a **MOTION** to approve the Cooperative Extension staffing continuity and salary funding formula for pro-rated annual across the board increases and longevity pay for all Cooperative Extension employees effective July 1, 2015. The motion also includes approval of the core staffing plan and covers the extension of the part-time employment contract for Ms. Belinda Belch through the end of 2015 as requested. Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Recreation Department – handicap accessible playground project update – Donna Mizelle

Parks and Recreation Director, Donna Mizelle, provided the Board with an update about the recent grant the County received for \$250,000 for a handicap accessible playground.

Ms. Mizelle reported that she and County Manager Sauer had recently met with 3 different playground companies who will present their ideas and plans to the Department on October 19th. At that point, the Board would then receive the proposals for consideration.

Ms. Mizelle stated that this was a very exciting time and that the “wheels were certainly” turning with so many ideas for the new playground at the Recreation Complex.

She also discussed a grant requirement from Trillium which is a Liberty Swing. All proposals that will be received on October 19th will meet this requirement.

Commissioner Trent commended Ms. Mizelle for his diligence in securing this grant and for her continued work to make the playground a reality.

**Discuss proposed date for 2015 Employee Appreciation Luncheon –
Thursday, December 3, 2015**

The Board concurred and officially set the 2015 Employee Appreciation Luncheon date to Thursday, December 3, 2015 at 1:00PM over at the Council on Aging building.

Discuss and consider approval of revised Travel Reimbursement Policy

After some discussion, Commissioner Bazemore made a **MOTION** to approve the newly revised County Travel Reimbursement Policy. Vice Chairman Lee **SECONDED** the motion with the contingency that if problems arose for the Finance Department regarding the two different meal reimbursement options that the Board could revisit that section, if needed. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Commissioner Trent provided a brief update on the courthouse renovation project. He stated that painting was still underway, and that new windows and shutters will be installed in the coming week weather permitting.

Chairman Wesson thanked the Board for its continued support of infrastructure improvements that have been long overdue for this County.

He also reiterated that the latest unemployment figures favoring Bertie County and how they were mostly due to this Board working together to ensure that as many Bertie County citizens as possible are hired to complete work for the County.

Lastly, Mr. Wesson publicly stated his support for the non-profit, Esquires for Education, and that the needs of Bertie County citizens are more important than anything else.

Vice Chairman Lee stated that the Mobile Food Bank provided by the Albemarle Food Pantry would be open to all citizens in the Town of Colerain soon, and that if citizens would like more information, they could contact Council on Aging Director, Venita Thompson.

Chairman Wesson commended Vice Chairmen Lee for her work on this project in regards to community support and turn out.

Additionally, the Vice Chairman announced that 6 members of the “Balancing Nature and Commerce in Northeastern North Carolina” committee sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wild Life Service would be participating in an eco-tourism conference in the coming weeks.

Commissioner White commended the Town of Aulander for another outstanding Peanut Festival held last month.

Mr. White also forwarded a concern he had received from Town of Kelford Mayor, Bailey Parker, about issues in the area with abandoned vehicles.

Chairman Wesson stated that there would be a meeting in the coming weeks with the Mid-East Commission, and that he would be sure to raise this concern with them to see if a solution could be found.

Lastly, Commissioner White discussed the process in funding non-profits, and stated that he stood for all citizens of the County. He also publicly stated that he believed some recent comments made about Vice Chairman Lee were “unfair,” and that all citizens and all lives matter.

COUNTY MANAGER’S REPORTS

County Manager Sauer reminded the Board of their recent decision to postpone the October 19th meeting until October 26th. Same location with a possible work session beginning earlier in the day and it was also clarified that there would be no work session on October 13th.

COUNTY ATTORNEY REPORTS

The County Attorney gave no remarks at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS CONTINUED

Bobby Williams, Site Manager of the Historic Hope Foundation, invited the Board to host a meeting at the Heritage Center. He stated that the Foundation would be happy to provide a meal to the Board as well.

Lastly, Mr. Williams reported the concern of excess trash at School Road and NC 308 and asked for suggestions on how to combat this problem.

Chairman Wesson suggested that he network with Ms. Lori Speller at the Bertie County Early College, and to possibly consider having high school student volunteers looking for community service hours to complete this task as well.

Dr. Michael Elam, President of Roanoke-Chowan Community College (RCCC), commended the Commissioners for their work in the recently establish CADET Corrections Academy and stated that the program was making excellent progress. He thanked the Commissioners for always being involved.

He also reminder the Board about the African American male mentoring program on campus, as well as about an upcoming health clinic to be opened on campus.

Chairman Wesson thanked Dr. Elam for being present in Bertie County and for advocating for Bertie County students at RCCC.

ADJOURN

Chairman Wesson adjourned the meeting at 5:45PM.

Ronald D. Wesson, Chairman

Sarah S. Tinkham, Clerk to the Board