

Windsor, North Carolina
June 15, 2015
Regular Meeting

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners met for their regularly scheduled meeting at 7:00pm inside the 2nd floor Courtroom of the Bertie County Courthouse located at 108 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
 Assistant County Attorney Jonathan Huddleston
 Emergency Services Director Mitch Cooper
 Finance Officer William Roberson
 Council on Aging Director Venita Thompson
 Department of Social Services Director Linda Speller
 Sheriff John Holley
 Utility Customer Service Manager Connie Coburn
 Utility Customer Service Representative Alicia Jones
 Utility Customer Service Betty Farmer
 Water Field Technician Elliot Kee
 Register of Deeds Annie Wilson
 Maintenance Superintendent Anthony Rascoe
 Maintenance Worker Jerome Edwards
 Maintenance Worker James Swain
 Custodian Shanita Cherry
 Custodian Lutricia Morris
 Information Systems Administrator Scott Pearce
 Network Administrator Joe Wilkes
 Emergency Services Director Mitch Cooper

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

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Wesson welcomed all of those present and thanked them for their attendance.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice Chairman Lee led the Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Gary Terry came before the Board to present an initiative and resolution regarding offshore drilling, and requested that the Board review the document, and consider drafting a resolution of support.

The Board concurred, and stated that the matter would be investigated.

Barbara Outlaw of Powellsville commended the Sheriff for all of his efforts regarding the latest drug operation, and thanked him and his department for its protection of the County.

James Pugh of Lewiston-Woodville encouraged the Commissioners to continue to help those most in need, and help to allow everyone to “be somebody.”

James Bell of New Horizons in Merry Hill was present to represent his organization that assists children with the Federal Summer Feeding program, as well as various classes, and after school programs. Mr. Bell was seeking funding as well as assistance in finding the appropriate grants to fund these initiatives. He also stated that he’d like network and collaborate with other area organizations.

Chairman Wesson thanked Mr. Bell for coming forward with a vision and that the County would look into possible funding opportunities, and encouraged Mr. Bell to network with the various organization representatives present tonight.

Willie Outlaw of Powellsville asked for an update regarding available jobs around the County, and asked to hear about some of the County’s latest efforts.

APPOINTMENTS

Public Hearing – citizen feedback regarding the proposed budget for FY 2015-2016

County Manager Sauer briefly introduced some PowerPoint slides that were also distributed to the public present.

Chairman Wesson then requested that the following statement be placed into the record:

Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Board of Commissioners seeks your input and comments as we review the County Manager's proposed budget for next year.

There is no tax rate increase proposed for next year, and we believe that the revenues are estimated very conservatively.

The Board met twice last week to review the proposed budget and to hear from our school system regarding their budget request for next year. And we have directed the County Manager and his staff to try to find ways to provide additional funding for the school system next year.

Each of the Commissioners seated here this evening who were elected by you and your neighbors, have provided significant guidance and direction to the County Manager for the preparation of this budget.

In early February, we spent two long days discussing priorities, setting goals and creating a vision for the upcoming budget.

We have agreed to support the following initiatives:

- *Continue to extend the highest level of pre-hospital emergency paramedic care on a 24/7 basis to our citizens at the lowest possible cost, which is complemented by the County's non-emergency transport service.*
- *Address critical infrastructure and deferred facility maintenance concerns such as the courthouse repairs and regional jail renovations.*
- *Focus on economic development strategies and build on the recent selection of a marketing firm to promote Bertie County's four business clusters.*
- *Strengthen the County's regional water system with infrastructure improvements, consolidation of municipal systems and seeking financing for technology and system management enhancements. This includes running the County's water utility system as a business, and providing the proper equipment, training and technology for our employees.*

- *Build on the successful partnership with the Board of Education and both community colleges for workforce training (EMS Cadet program for example).*
- *Offer community-based recreation with the YMCA and our Recreation staff, in partnership with the school system and local municipalities.*
- *Invest in “Human Capital” and recognize the value of County staff, by taking steps to provide a working wage, retain talented department managers and plan for the succession and next generation of employees. And continue this effort for the long term by engaging a compensation and classification study for all county staff in the next fiscal year.*
- *Continued support for the non-profit agencies in our community who reach the under-served populations or play a unique role in defining Bertie County as a special place to visit, invest, live, work and raise a family.*

The Board of Commissioners, both collectively and individually have taken steps to improve the quality of life for our citizens, to create business opportunities and to improve access to employment.

Recently, the County was recognized for participating with the National Association of Counties to serve all Bertie residents with discount prescription cards and access to discounted healthcare and dental services. This program was just launched a few weeks ago, and the response has been very positive.

Just since January, the Board has placed a significant focus on spending tax dollars locally and supporting small businesses in our area. Infrastructure projects such as the renovations at the regional jail and infrastructure improvements at County facilities are mostly being performed by Bertie County contractors and businesses.

When the Board negotiated the new contract with Republic Services for the operation of the solid waste and recycling convenience centers, the Commissioners pushed to insure that during the transition from Waste Industries to the new company—all current employees were able to secure job offers and maintain their employment with even better fringe benefits.

We also are working very hard to make sure that Bertie citizens have access to existing employment and jobs already available at the State prison. Next week we have representatives from the Governor’s office coming to Bertie County to introduce a “community engagement” program to connect our citizens with these State jobs that are already here.

The Governor's office has even suggested that we build on the success of the EMS Cadet program at Bertie high school that has been supported by Roanoke-Chowan Community College; and the State wants us to initiate a similar Cadet program for Corrections Officers and law enforcement to create a career pathway for our students.

This spring the Board committed to increasing law enforcement salaries by 5% which became effective two months ahead of the new budget. We have worked closely with the Sheriff to make sure that our deputies make positive strides in their career advancement.

The Board sought proposals to enhance the County's Economic Development program and to implement marketing strategies with a special emphasis on encouraging entrepreneurship and small business development. This work is just about to begin now that the contract has been approved and signed.

Community Based Recreation is fully funded in the proposed FY 2015-2016 budget with support from the YMCA and the school system, plus several towns.

In terms of "human capital" the Board is considering the establishment of a 401 k supplemental retirement program with a two percent annual contribution. We are also looking at a 3 percent salary increase for non-public safety personnel.

And there is significant improvement for the employees who need a boost for a better "working wage" such as custodians, maintenance workers and water department personnel.

The Board has also reviewed recommendations to address internal pay equity and salary compression for long term employees, and providing salaries that more accurately reflect the talent, critical responsibilities, and workload managed by some of our key staff. And with a compensation study for next year, this is just the first step in taking care of the people who take care of all of us every day in Bertie County.

The Board is also establishing a health savings account for each employee with an initial contribution of \$200. This Board of Commissioners recognizes how difficult it is to provide for your family, especially healthcare, and we want to help cover just a small part of those medical and prescription co-pay expenses.

The Board also recognizes that employees and their families are stressed economically and in many other ways. So beginning July 1st, all county staff will also have access to an employee assistance program with counseling support for employees, spouses and dependents to assist families who might be struggling with financial planning, marital issues or substance and alcohol abuse. Up to six counseling sessions are available for each covered member before any out of pocket payments toward the deductible are due.

Ladies and gentlemen, the budget is now open for your suggestions, comments and ideas as to how we can best use the resources that have been entrusted to us. We want to hear from you and we appreciate your participation in this process.

We have a sign-up sheet, and each speaker will be asked to limit his or her comments to three (3) minutes so that everyone has an opportunity to address the Board this evening.

Thank you

Chairman Wesson then opened the public hearing to receive public comments.

Monica Lassiter of Lewiston-Woodville commended the Board its work and stated that she supports the proposed budget.

Willie Outlaw of Powellsville asked Vice Chairman Lee to elaborate on a stance she recently took against large raises for County employees all at one time.

Vice Chairman Lee responded by stating that she felt a large percentage raise for any one employee all at one time was too extraordinary, and that she felt a duty to protect the citizen's tax dollars. She reiterated that she was in favor of the 3% across the board increase for non-public safety personnel, as well as the proposed 2% 401k retirement match.

Norman Cherry, Interim Director of the Martin Community College Bertie Campus, stated that he supported the proposed budget, and thanked the Board for the funding allotted for the Bertie campus, and stated that he would bring more information forward soon regarding the proposed welding program initiative mentioned at a previous meeting.

Patricia Ferguson came forward to commend the Board for their work, but strongly encouraged the Board to consider adopting a County Plan to End Poverty (CPEP) as there are very few anti-poverty organizations in the County. She listed that The Hive House in West Bertie as well as the Choanoke Area Development Association (CADA) were currently the only two organizations operating programs to end poverty. She also stated her disappointment with the lack of funding being given to the two organizations, and encouraged the Board to consider anti-poverty initiatives more carefully as Bertie County is the most impoverished county in the State.

Kevin Spivey encourage the Board to continue to find alternative activities for children in various communities, as well as to always consider C.G. White and J.P. Laws as possible host locations. He also discussed the latest happenings at C.G. White which include activities for kids such as: digital library, recreation, and technology education.

Chairman Wesson concurred and stated that County dollars can help, but the biggest thing that was needed was community involvement, and individuals who are willing to volunteer their time to help organize and run various activities whether they are recreational or educational.

Sallie Surface, Executive Director of CADA, approached the Board with her concerns regarding the County's proposed funding amount to her organization. Ms. Surface reported that in the last year, 26 families had been assisted in foreclosure prevention, and that the programs CADA offers are extremely valuable to the County in regards to economic development, infrastructure, and financial impact. She also reported that the future of the NC Works (formerly known as Joblink) Center in Windsor was in jeopardy, as continued funding cuts for the local and state levels continue to hinder CADA's ability to retain qualified staff, supplies, and other operational needs. Additionally, it was noted that CADA was no longer the administrator of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) due to a recent decision made by the Mid-East Commission. Ms. Surface concluded by reiterating the amount of lives that are impacted positively by CADA's programs, and she strongly encouraged the Board to consider additional funding to the organization.

Vivian Saunders of The Hive House in West Bertie came before the Board to thank them for the support that The Hive House has received in recent years, and also thanked the Board for finalizing a community based recreational program in collaboration with the YMCA. She stated that she is also in the process of applying for various grants, and is always looking for additional grant funding options.

Commissioner Bazemore inquired about the amount of citizens served by The Hive House in the last year.

Ms. Saunder replied by stating that approximately 300-400 children and teens have been served during the last year, but that the number could be larger as the center is a 24/7 operational hotspot.

Elliot Kee, Water Field Technician for Bertie County, thanked the Board for trying to create a more suitable "living wage" for the County water and maintenance departments. He stated that this 3% market share increase would be a great start, if approved, and that he looked forward to additional deliberations in the coming years.

Kashi B. Hall, Founding Executive Director of Heritage Collegiate Leadership Academy (HCLA) was present to ask the Board to not forget that HCLA is also public school. She reported that even on a small \$2 million budget last fiscal year, her and her staff were able to handle all expenses to found the school, and because of their hard work, test scores were significantly improving. She concluded by stating that she is more than grateful for the financial help in the past, but encouraged the Board to continue to remember HCLA as they want to be a part of Bertie County's growth.

There were no additional comments. Chairman Wesson closed the public hearing on the proposed FY2015-2016 budget.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Economic Development Commission

Commissioner Trent made a **MOTION** to re-appoint Buneva Everett to the Economic Development Commission. Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

Approve regular minutes for 6-1-15

This item was deferred.

Approve Closed Session minutes for 6-1-15

This item was deferred.

Approve minutes for the joint meeting with the Board of Education on 6-8-15

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to approve the minutes for the joint meeting with the Board of Education on 6-8-15. Vice Chairman Lee **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Approve minutes for the budget work session on 6-9-15

County Manager Sauer recommended this item for approval.

Commissioner Bazemore made a **MOTION** to approve the minutes for the budget work session on 6-9-15. Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Consider for approval the proposed Resolution and Articles of Association – Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) as recently recommended by the Mid-East Commission

Chairman Wesson strongly recommended this item for approval as there is currently a very large presence of Bertie County representatives on the Region Q Workforce Development Board.

Vice Chairman Lee made a **MOTION** to approve proposed Resolution and Articles of Association for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) as recommended by Mid-East Commission. Commissioner White **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

County Manager Sauer was also asked to be listed as the “Chief Elected Official” of Bertie County for this initiative.

Accept Tax Department Error Ledger – May 2015

County Manager Sauer recommended this item for approval.

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to accept the Tax Department Error Ledger from May 2015. Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Approve agreement for transportation services with Choanoke Public Transportation Authority (CPTA), and funding update

County Manager Sauer recommended this item for approval.

Commissioner Bazemore made a **MOTION** to approve the agreement for transportation services with Choanoke Public Transportation Authority (CPTA). Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

DISCUSSION AGENDA

Discuss NC Connect 2015 Bond Information

After a brief discussion, the Board encouraged all citizens present to visit <http://connect.ncdot.gov> to familiarize themselves with the proposal made by Governor Pat McCrory.

The Board stated that despite some concerns regarding the rural communities in the State, this program would bring a significant amount of additional funding to the County if the bond were to be passed.

The Board also encourages citizens to contact their State representatives with their questions or concerns regarding the information, and to continue to watch this matter through the news media as it unfolds.

Review House Bill 640 – The Outdoor Heritage Act as requested by Senator Erica Smith-Ingram

The Board presented an update to the citizens present regarding House Bill 640 also known as “The Outdoor Heritage Act,” as requested by Senator Erica Smith-Ingram.

Chairman Wesson reported that this bill had passed, and that the only restriction made was that gun hunting could not begin on Sunday’s until after church hours.

Vice Chairman Lee also reported that this issue would also be seen again on the County level in the year 2018 when the Counties are then given the opportunity to decide for themselves whether or not to continue Sunday gun hunting, or to consider other options.

The Board encouraged all citizens to follow the State’s movements in the news media as it is quite a busy time for the local, state, and federal levels regarding budget season, and other matters.

Discuss final budget review and set date for adoption of the FY 2015-2016 Budget Ordinance

After some discussion, the Board stated that tonight’s meeting would be recessed until Thursday, June 18, 2015 at 2:00PM. The Board will continue to work towards adopting a budget at another budget work session at the County Offices in Windsor.

Consider canceling regular Board meeting for Monday, July 6, 2015

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to cancel the Board’s regular meeting for Monday, July 6, 2015. Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

The Board’s next regularly scheduled meeting will be held at 7:00PM on Monday, July 20, 2015 at the Blue Jay Fire Department in Indian Woods.

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Commissioner White thanked Sheriff John Holley for his diligent work over the past week in assisting in the multi-agency effort in apprehending various drug dealers in the County.

Commissioner Bazemore introduced a new USDA grant item that could be utilized in the future to create a Boys & Girls Club for the County, as well as to possibly assist with other local needs.

Commissioner Trent provided an update regarding the renovations being made to the Bertie-Martin Regional Jail. He report that plumbing needs were currently being addressed, and were in the wrap up stages, and that work on the facilities roof was slated to being soon. He also thanked Bertie County Emergency Services for their participation in ensuring the health of all individuals apprehended during the past week's drug bust.

Chairman Wesson reiterated his admiration for a citizen funded, backpack program for children in the County. The program will provide backpacks filled with fresh fruits and other food essentials for the County's neediest children to take home with them on the weekends as some students solely rely on reduced or free meal options during the school year. He encouraged all of those present to get involved with the program if they were able.

COUNTY MANAGER'S REPORTS

The County Manager gave no remarks at this time.

ASSISTANT COUNTY ATTORNEY'S REPORTS

The Assistant County Attorney gave no remarks at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS CONTINUED

There were no public comments during this section.

RECESS

Chairman Wesson recessed this meeting until 2:00PM on Thursday, June 18, 2015 inside the Commissioners Room located at the County Offices, 106 Dundee Street, Windsor, NC 27983.

Ronald D. Wesson, Chairman

Sarah S. Tinkham, Clerk to the Board