

Windsor, North Carolina
June 9, 2015
Recessed Meeting

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners recessed its regular meeting on Monday, June 1, 2015 in order to meet jointly with the Bertie County Board of Education inside the old Bertie High School, as well as to host a budget work session in Windsor today at 5:00PM. 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
Finance Officer William Roberson

There were no media members present.

RECONVENE OF THE BERTIE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Wesson reconvened the meeting which was recessed on June 8th, a continuation of the Board’s regular meeting from Monday, June 1, 2015.

Ms. Laree Cherry presented the JCPC program’s County Plan for 2015-2016, and reviewed the funding proposal for next fiscal year. Three programs will be offered: MHFC Vocational and Educational, Children Matters, and Second Chance Counts. The total funding including state grants is \$99,471 and a local match equal to last year’s funding of \$8,718 is requested.

Commissioner Bazemore made a **MOTION** to approve the County Plan. Vice Chairman Lee **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Commissioner Trent made a **MOTION** to approve the funding request as presented. Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

County Manager Sauer referred the Board to two items at their desk.

First was the auditor’s request for completion of the annual questionnaire requiring each Commissioner’s signature.

Second was a copy of NCGS 115C-38 as requested by the Chairman regarding board member compensation for the Board of Education.

Chairman Wesson noted that the public hearing for the budget is next Monday, June 15, 2015 and suggested that the Commissioners agree on the format and rules of procedure for the hearing.

Specifically, it was discussed and agreed upon that each citizen wishing to speak would sign up on the speaker's sheet at the beginning of the meeting, and each speaker will be allowed 3 minutes for comments on the proposed budget.

It was also noted that if the attendance is large, provisions will be made to relocate the hearing to the large courtroom on the second floor of the courthouse.

Chairman Wesson asked the County Manager to review his analysis and recommendations relative to the Board of Education's request for additional current expense and capital outlay funding for next year.

Mr. Sauer noted that the proposed budget included \$2,503,000 for current expense and \$250,000 for capital outlay and that these recommendations were predicated on not increasing the tax rate and avoiding additional appropriation of fund balance reserves.

Mr. Sauer reviewed the County's debt service requirements for school financing and the calculated use of capital reserve funds to meet these annual obligations.

Sauer's presentation included a review of estimated revenues and projections for both FY 2015-2016 and FY 2016-2017 cautioning that it is impossible to accurately predict the future.

Specifically, the County Manager noted the conservative use of the federal subsidy monies for the Qualified School Construction Bonds, provided through federal stimulus funding to finance the new high school. Each year, this federal payment of approximately \$700,000 is subject to Congressional approval and has been negatively impacted by the past two sequestration cycles in Congress.

The County Manager explained that he and the Finance Officer, Mr. Roberson, have estimated that the Board has limited flexibility to increase school funding and that its sustainability for the future will be difficult to predict.

There was much discussion amongst the Commissioners regarding the declining student enrollment, the desire to work with the Board of Education in order to retain high quality teachers, and the willingness to find a compromise on the funding issue.

There was also discussion about the increasing operating expenses due to the addition of the new high school, the continued use of the former high school campus, and the fiscal burden of maintaining the current number of campuses across the County.

It was the consensus of the Board to have the Manager and Finance Officer incorporate an additional \$500,000 for current expense and an additional \$15,000 for capital outlay for FY 2015-2016.

This adjustment was noted in recognition of the school board's effort in the past two years to utilize its own fund balance to cover annual operating expenses as suggested by the Board of Commissioners.

There was also Board discussion and suggestions from the Commissioners regarding program initiatives being developed by both community colleges that may include welding, dental hygiene, law enforcement and corrections, and other programs requiring local support in the future.

The Board also discussed the County appropriations to non-profit agencies and community partners, and the need for more information regarding programs and the number of lives impacted in Bertie County.

Commissioners then discussed the proposed salary increases for non-public safety employees, and the two percent contribution for establishment of a 401k supplemental program for non-law enforcement employees.

The County Manager also responded to questions regarding the position reclassifications, staff promotions, and recommendations to improve the "working wage" for maintenance, custodial, and water department workers in the proposed budget. There was much discussion regarding the need to advance these efforts, conduct further study, and plan for another cycle of compensation recommendations next year, and to continue to recognize the value of the County's staff in meeting the Board's priorities.

Chairman Wesson encouraged each Commissioner to consider how the Board can improve its communications with the public, to "get our message out" to citizens regarding the County's priorities, its accomplishments and the work on future projects to improve our infrastructure, preserve the courthouse and expand the economic development efforts in our County.

It was noted that the Board has taken steps to support our employees with the establishment of the employee assistance program beginning July 1, 2015, plus the \$200 contribution for each staff member into a health savings account to assist with medical co-payments and pharmacy costs.

Commissioners also discussed the positive feedback from the public regarding the NACo prescription, health, and dental program recently initiated at the urging of Commissioner Bazemore.

One citizen was in attendance, former Commissioner Patricia Ferguson, who requested an opportunity to address the Board.

Ms. Ferguson indicated that she will be advocating for anti-poverty programs at the public hearing next week.

She complimented the Commissioners regarding their discussion, debate, and willingness to face difficult issues.

Ms. Ferguson encouraged the Board to continue to work toward “getting your message out” to the communities regarding priorities, the direction the County is heading and focusing on community and economic development.

Ms. Ferguson said she was also very pleased to see the Board’s support for the school system.

There was no further discussion.

ADJOURN

Chairman Wesson adjourned the meeting at 7:15PM.

Ronald D. Wesson, Chairman

Sarah S. Tinkham, Clerk to the Board