

Windsor, North Carolina
January 28, 2016
Planning Session

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners recessed the regular meeting from January 21, 2016 in order to meet today at the Roanoke-Cashie River Center for an all-day planning session. 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
 Assistant County Attorney Clifton Smith
 Finance Officer William Roberson
 Human Resources/Risk Management Director Carolyn Fornes

No media members were present.

RECONVENE/CALL TO ORDER

At 9:00AM, Chairman Trent reconvened the Board’s regular meeting from January 21, 2016.

The Board recessed that meeting in order to conduct a planning session today at the Roanoke-Cashie River Center.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Wesson the Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

PLANNING SESSION AGENDA

Chairman Trent welcomed everyone and encouraged the Board to work diligently through the agenda, and then asked the County Manager to review the first item on the agenda.

Mr. Sauer shared the draft copy of the Board's initiatives and departmental activities for the 2015 year in review.

Vice Chairman Bazemore inquired about the status of developing a County newsletter and several Commissioners indicated that this information should be included. Commissioner White said that he would like to see this document published in the two local newspapers.

Commissioner Wesson suggested that the County use all types of media to improve communications with the citizens including electronic and digital formats.

Chairman Trent closed the discussion as asked the County Manager to proceed to the next item.

Health Insurance Coverage for Employees & Retirees

Mr. Sauer reminded the Commissioners that on December 7th, the Board voted to accelerate the proposed enrollment period for the State Health Plan from July 1 to March 1, and on January 13th the NC State Treasurer's office responded with "Welcome to the State Health Plan."

There are several key decisions that will need Board action immediately so that the enrollment process can begin on February 1st and it is critical that we have a plan for transitioning the existing retirees to new coverage and complete their enrollment by February 15th so that their coverage is also effective March 1st with no lapse.

County Manager Sauer introduced Mr. Steve Worgan representing Worksite Resources and explained that his firm has successfully assisted our local health department staff (Albemarle Regional Health Services) with transitioning their retirees to BCBS with individual plans.

ARHS staff transitioned to the State Health effective January 1, 2016 and the retiree conversion to individual BCBS plans occurred simultaneously.

Director Jerry Parks has extended an offer for his staff to spend time in Bertie County to assist with our transition.

Mr. Sauer explained that Commissioner Lee sits on the ARHS and serves on the executive committee which worked very closely with Jerry Parks and his executive team on this endeavor. Commissioner Lee said that she felt there was no need to "reinvent the wheel" if we could model our process after ARHS's transition plan.

Carolyn Fornes, Human Resources/Risk Management Director, explained the State Health Plan options and reviewed the comparisons for both current employee health coverage and retiree health insurance benefits being proposed.

County Manager Sauer, Ms. Fornes and Mr. Worgan responded to several questions and concerns raised by the Commissioners.

In summary, Mr. Sauer explained that the Board is being asked to approve the following:

- To initiate enrollment for county employees in the State Health Plan using the 70/30 traditional plan, and to immediately take steps to enroll all Bertie County retirees with individual coverage, paid by the County using the Blue Advantage “Silver 2500” plan.
- To engage the services of Worksite Resources, LLC to assist our retirees with the enrollment process and to guide them through the transition period navigating at each step.
- To accept the staff assistance and technical support offered by the ARHS executive director in order to provide the County’s Human Resource Department with extra help and guidance during this transition over the next 30 days.
- To maintain all other benefit plans available to employees and retirees under the current agreement with the Pierce Group through Ms. Donna Nixon’s office.

Chairman Trent asked that the cost savings for the employee health coverage be noted:

- Current BCBS monthly premium per employee is \$571 each pay period.
- State Health Plan monthly premium is \$463.68 which is a differential (savings) of \$107 per employee per month and estimated as saving the taxpayers \$231,120 annually.

Commissioner White asked for clarification on the cost for the individual retiree plans which will increase annual premium costs by approximately \$120,000 and will be offset by the savings noted above and reflected in next year’s budget.

For the record, County Manager Sauer provided a written summary of the personnel policy impact as prepared by Attorney Jonathan Huddleston:

Legal note: *Article VI, Section 1 of the personnel policy which says that employee benefits are “subject to change at the County’s discretion” is sufficient to allow the County to make changes to retiree health insurance benefits. There is no case directly on point with our set of facts, but the case law dealing with similar situations seem to indicate that without that “subject to change” language in the policy, retiree health benefits would be a form of deferred compensation and the benefits could have vested upon the employee attaining the required years of service. It would have been contractual in nature. However, with the language saying that the County can change the benefits in Article VI at its discretion, then there can be no*

vesting. The County's right to change the benefits does not end when an employee attains the required years of service. There is a 4th circuit federal court case where the City of Wilmington eliminated longevity pay. The employees sued, and the 4th Circuit court of appeals ruled in favor of the city because its original longevity ordinance said that "as budgeted by the City Council, annual longevity pay will be provided to all full-time, permanent employees of the City." The court held that the "as budgeted" language meant that the payment of longevity pay was dependent on annual funding. If there wasn't enough in the budget for it, the City didn't have to pay it. The court said that the point was further underscored by the longevity pay's inclusion as a line item in each city budget for 22 years before it was eliminated. Similarly, Bertie County can make the same decision under its "subject to change at the County's discretion" language as it considers the long term accrued financial liability under the current benefits package.

Following extensive discussion, Chairman Trent made a **MOTION** to approve the recommendations outlined by the County Manager for transitioning to the State Health Plan. Commissioner Lee **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

OPEB and other post-employment benefits

County Manager Sauer explained that as previously requested by the governing body, staff have prepared a matrix of approximately 25 counties to compare the eligibility strategies for future retiree health insurance in order to better manage or reduce this increasing annual contribution requirement and the long term accrued financial liability which is approaching \$4 million and is currently unfunded.

County Manager Sauer explained that the Chairman had suggested that the Board consider a funding formula to address the unfunded accrued liability which had not been addressed in previous years.

Chairman Trent suggested a monthly contribution of \$100 per employee to be budgeted which should provide approximated \$240,000 per year.

Copies of the staff report were on future retiree health insurance eligibility were distributed to the Commissioners.

Mr. Sauer also indicated that on Monday February 1st at 2:00PM the Board will have a discussion with former NC Local Government Commission senior staff member, Mr. Lee Carter, about funding an irrevocable trust for the purpose of meeting the accrued liability for long term retiree health insurance which is currently unfunded. FY 2014-2015 audit reported this figure is \$3.8 million.

Job Classification and Compensation Study

Mr. Sauer provided a brief overview of the recently initiated engagement which is currently in process at the department level.

QSCB Sinking Fund bid proposals

Mr. Sauer updated the governing body regarding the preparation for taking bids for the sinking fund required as part of the high school's Qualified School Construction Bonds. A summary prepared by the County's two fiscal advisors with Davenport and Kensington-Capital was provided as follows:

Fiscal note: When last presented to the Board in early December, the estimated QSCB sinking fund earnings rate was 2.27%. Since that time, we have experienced a fairly consistent decline in interest rates. A "Flight to Quality" by investors looking for the relative safety of US Treasury securities and shorter-term overnight investments has contributed to this decline. The yield on the 10-year treasury has fallen from 2.28% on December 4th to 2.10% on January 14th; likewise, the rate for 10-year interest rate swaps has fallen from a 2.2% to a 1.93% over that same period of time.

As a result, the current estimated rate for the sinking fund investment is approximately 1.85% compared to the maximum allowable earnings rate of 3.10% and the assumed earnings rate of 1.50% at the time of pricing the bonds (assumed rate in our planning model).

Working with its investment advisor (Kensington Capital) and Bond Counsel (Hunton & Williams), the County has continued to push forward to prepare the necessary documents for the Sinking Fund Investment. The Bid Specifications have been prepared and will be circulated to potential investment providers for review and discussion early this week. It is anticipated that any comments / conditions to the Bid Specifications will be received by early the week of January 25th. Once this process is complete the County will be in a position to accept bids for the investment.

Given the recent developments in the interest rate market, we thought it would be beneficial to review the County's options at this point:

1. Continue to move forward with the bid process and "lock-in" the best available interest rate at this time. While this will be below the maximum allowable earnings rate, it is still higher than the assumed planning rate (1.50%) when the bonds were priced
2. Delay the acceptance of bids until interest rates increase to a level closer to the maximum allowable rate or some other targeted rate. Given the work that has already been done, the County would be in a position to "lock-in" an investment rate within approximately ten days from a decision to move forward.

A change in the investment rate from 2.27% to 1.85% (42 basis point decrease) reduces the interest earned over the life of the investment by approximately \$498,900. The present value of this interest is approximately \$322,150.

Following a brief discussion the Board agreed by consensus to accept the two recommendations noted above and at the appropriate time the County Manager and the Chairman will contact the Commissioners individually by telephone when it is advisable to proceed.

Receipt of audited financial statements for fiscal year ended June 30, 2015

Mr. Sauer noted that it is now time to begin the budget planning and midyear review of key revenues and program expenditures (e.g. Paramedic and NETS) scheduled for the second meeting in February.

Hospital refinancing proposal

Chairman Trent reported that is project is pending confirmation from VIDANT that of the proposed refinancing for the hospital debt, and the Board's goal is achieve these savings as a cost reduction for the County—net of the hospital's annual lease payments would remain unchanged.

Cumulative savings for the remaining life of the loan is \$170,522 based on most recent estimates.

Additionally, Chairman Trent indicated that it would be advisable for the Board to review other aspects of the hospital lease.

Commissioner Wesson made a **MOTION** to have the County's legal counsel, with assistance from a CPA, review the debt components and indigent funding requirement stipulations for the current lease and any future obligations once the debt is retired. Commissioner White **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

County Manager Sauer reminded the Board of its previously approved projects which are now pending and beginning to require significant staff time and attention from Finance, Legal and Administration as outlined below:

Water District II—State Revolving Fund approval for \$1,339,350 has been approved and is pending review and approval by the NC Local Government Commission.

Water District III—USDA Rural Development \$1.7 million loan process pending review by the NC Local Government Commission.

Water District IV—State Revolving Fund approval for \$1,678,550 with a grant of \$500,000 in principal forgiveness.

CDBG Infrastructure Grant—water line construction and connection for Farm Lane residents.

Following the update on these Water Department related projects, Vice Chairman Bazemore asked about the status of the citizen’s request regarding a water line extension (Mr. Morris) and the County Manager indicated that Mr. Spivey was still looking at options to address it.

Chairman Trent asked the County Manager to then review several items related to the Sheriff’s office”

Sheriff—Electronic Monitoring Program—pending legal review.

Sheriff—Office relocation pending minor repairs and renovation at former Board of Education building including new generator.

Sheriff—Position turnover, recruitment and retention strategies, possible compensation adjustments. Mr. Sauer reported that approximately \$50,000 in savings from lapsed salaries is available for this effort. The Board listed several areas to discuss with Sheriff Holley including providing financial support for a job candidate in BLET school; providing “12 hour ride time” for BLET candidates; a possible sign on bonus for new hires; payment of time and a half overtime in lieu of compensatory time; and allowing employees to “sell back” up to forty hours of annual leave each year.

Sheriff --Communication Center back-up PSAP regional project in conjunction with Martin County.

Maintenance Department projects

County Manager Sauer then review projects previously approved, discussed or in-progress:

- **Courthouse**—next phase of improvements (options for interior/exterior) improvements such as painting, new signage and furniture plus security recommendations from Sheriff, Judges and Clerk of Court which will include hardware and staffing. Vice Chairman Bazemore provided a contact for assistance at the UNC Surplus Store to identify good quality furniture items.
- **Administration building**—planning for similar improvements (mostly cosmetic) to coordinate with the Courthouse updates, plus continued bat extraction issues due to continued complaints regarding poor quality of HVAC ventilation system. It was the consensus of the Board that the HVAC issues were to take priority.
- **Building extensions**—Water & Maintenance department's operations facilities on County Farm Road—both to start and finish simultaneously this spring.

Bertie Martin Regional Jail -- Chairman Trent noted for the Board that renovations are near completion, and there will be discussion of future maintenance support to include additional staffing for the County Maintenance staff during the FY 2016-2017 budget process.

Other items were reviewed by the County Manager and the County Attorney included:

Sale of surplus County vehicles -- A sale is planned for early spring.

Trillium playground grant and contract agreement-- Design is currently underway.

“Tall Glass of Water”

A closing date has not yet been finalized due to the pending seller’s effort to resolve outstanding deed issues. In addition to:

- Master planning process—proposal to open communications with Dr. Celen Pasalar with NC State University’s School of Design, plus East Carolina University’s sustainable tourism program.
- Brainstorming for potential development and improvements, including a suggestion from the Board that a separate project team be established to assist with this project.
- Initiating grant application efforts such as NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) and the NC Parks system Recreational Trail Program grant. Waiver received this week which allows application to recoup land acquisition costs. Vice Chairman Bazemore clarified for the Board and the County Manager that the Recreational Trail Program grant is to be used for the Blue Jay Recreation project to provide much needed walking trails.
- Discussion of possible acquisition of ten acre adjoining tract.
- Seeking legislative support to add this project to the State or National Park System.

Commissioner Wesson suggested that this project is of such magnitude, that it may warrant having the Board establish a special project task force to assist the County Manager. The Board agreed to review this suggestion at a later date.

After much discussion regarding the 137 acre tract, previously referred to as the TGOW project, Commissioner Wesson made a **MOTION** to seek one more appraisal as required by the PARTF application, and a preliminary appraisal for the adjoining ten acre tract. Commissioner White **SECONDED** the motion and the **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Economic Development

The Board briefly reviewed the following ongoing projects:

- CREATIVE consults—presentation of final report and marketing strategies pending.
- Golden Peanut—rapid response team for worker transition.
- Regional eco-tourism initiative.
- Hotel Feasibility and site analysis—partnership with Town of Windsor.
- Possible partnerships with Scotch Hall for shooting range and RV camping park with connections to existing wastewater treatment plant. Also, potential golf outing sponsorship opportunities to raise funds for local programs (e.g. YMCA).

Chairman Trent asked the County Manager to review the grant opportunities that were currently under consideration so that the Board could establish priorities for the grant writing engagement with McAdams and Associates.

County Manager Sauer presented the following list for discussion:

Grant writer priorities for projects suggested or identified to date:

- TGOW—see above
- Dental program initiative
- Recreation facilities for Blue Jay Community—preparation of lease is pending
- Town of Aulander—ballfields
- Askewville—building renovations
- Basketball court at Recreation complex in Windsor
- Sheriff's Department body cameras and mobile computers for vehicles
- Police Department for Lewiston-Woodville
- Fire Department substation
- EMS Base Station—and the possible reuse of the former DSS/Health Department building to replace leased facility in downtown Windsor
- Affordable housing initiative—to assist teachers, corrections staff, law enforcement & public safety employees
- Methane recovery and poultry litter as input for power generation source (with 2 local industries)

Following a lengthy discussion regarding the projects listed above the Board achieve consensus to have the grant writer to focus on the following priorities:

- 1) Blue Jay Recreation improvements
- 2) Basketball Court for Recreation complex in Windsor
- 3) Previous effort with Aulander and Askewville will continue
- 4) Affordable housing for moderate income as described above
- 5) Energy (methane and poultry litter)

Following this discussion, the Board spent time reviewing activities and concerns regarding the Recreation Complex in Windsor.

After much debate, Vice Chairman Bazemore made a **MOTION** to have the chains at the entrance to the Recreation Complex in Windsor removed to improve accessibility to the facilities. Commissioner White **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Additionally, there was concern that the recreation complex lacked visibility from the highway, and there was interest expressed both in removing the abandoned house near the entrance and either thinning or clearing the wooded area.

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to engage a timber management firm to have the site evaluated both for a select cut and a clear cut, with the understanding that Mr. Mike Hoggard with the NC Forestry Service be consulted as part of this evaluation. Commissioner Wesson **SECONDED** the motion to proceed as outlined by Commissioner White. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

There was also discussion regarding the ownership of the ballfields in Askewville and it was agreed that the Board needed more information, and suggested that the County Manger bring back a report.

Several other items were reviewed as outlined below:

Freedom Foundation Monument

The Board reviewed potential sites, grant opportunities and potential steering committee appointments. Commissioner Lee reported that the Foundation which presented this project at the meeting in Roxobel is working to set up a local bank account for donations, and is exploring the use of various materials which may lower the cost of construction of these monuments which will contain copies of our nation's founding documents.

No determination on a suitable site has been established.

Projects requiring significant planning and legal review

County Manager Sauer stated that some of these projects are near term while others are further out on the horizon:

- TGOW—mentioned above.
- Republic Services operating agreement and franchise renewal for the next twenty (20) years—effective October 2018—the County Manager encouraged the Board to begin planning for these upcoming negotiations.
- Water system merger and consolidation agreements for the Towns of Lewiston-Woodville and Roxobel.
- Municipal service agreements for ordinance enforcement using Jonathan Huddleston's recommendations on November 16th.
- Public Safety Road Access Ordinance—to insure that all roads (public and private) are maintained and safe for residents accessing their homes, school bus transportation, law enforcement & EMS response and accessibility, etc. Attorney Clifton Smith presented two potential strategies for addressing the Board's concerns utilizing abatement authority through an ordinance and enforced in the court system, placing the financial burden on the property owner. More information will be forthcoming.

County Manager Sauer has recommended that following legal note be inserted in these minutes to reflect the County Attorneys ongoing research for this initiative as prepared by Jonathan Huddleston regarding a Public Safety Road Access Ordinance:

Possible options for the County to address private roads that are in poor condition:

- If an impassable road can be considered a public health nuisance, 153A-140 says that "a county shall have authority to remove, abate, or remedy everything that is dangerous or prejudicial to the public health or safety." The County could declare by resolution that private roads that are in such poor condition that they are impassable by EMS, fire and law enforcement vehicles are dangerous and prejudicial to the public health and safety and must be repaired to a certain standard. They then have to define that standard. They can also identify which types of private roads this would apply to. Once the property owners know what the standard is and whether it applies to them, they can be required to repair their roads and maintain them in a passable condition, as defined. If they don't comply, 153A-140 allows the County to repair the road for the owner and put a lien on it. A good feature of 153A-140 is that the lien can be enforced and collected as unpaid taxes, which means that the lien has super-priority over all other liens, even bank liens or IRS liens.
- 153A-123(e) is a statute similar to 153A-140 in that it requires a landowner to correct any "unlawful condition". It says that if an ordinance makes a condition on a landowner's land unlawful, and if the owner doesn't fix it after notice from the County, the County can get an injunction or an order of abatement, and then the County can fix it and charge the landowner for the cost and put a basic mechanics lien on the property (not collectable as a tax lien). This statute is usually used for dilapidated homes and structures, but it also can be used to enforce simple things like high grass and weeds. One could argue that if a County can make someone mow their grass to correct a problem, the County should also be able to make roads passable for EMS, fire and law enforcement, and school buses and postal service.

The challenge for the Board in developing this ordinance or resolution is insuring that it is not too vague or too broad to accomplish its purpose. Otherwise it is subject to challenge on constitutional grounds. Also, it has to be written in a way that its enforcement is not subject to attack in being arbitrary or capricious.

Two other options are:

- The County could condemn the road and then spend county funds to bring it up to DOT standards, but that would have to be done in cooperation with DOT to make sure that the road meets the requirements for the DOT to take it over when the work is done. NCGS 136-98 gives some authority to the County to improve roads, but the road needs to be a state road or turned over to the state by agreement.

- The County could use its special assessment authority to pay for road improvements, but there has to be a petition from 75% of the owners who represent 75% of the value of the property to be assessed. Under 153A-205 counties can pay for the local share of the cost of improvements to private roads to bring them up to DOT standards and then levy a special assessment on the property owners for the cost of the local share. They would also need to be done with DOT permission.

As you can see, the County's options are limited, but if the Commissioners want to press ahead with one of these we can help write something that will minimize the County's exposure as best we can.

Joint Fueling Station with the Board of Education

County Manager Sauer reported that the Bertie County Public School's Maintenance Director, Matthew Bond, has initiated a conversation with Anthony Rascoe and Ricky Spivey regarding the merits and potential cost savings of pooling our resources for bulk fuel purchases for both gasoline and diesel.

With the County's relocation of the Sheriff's Office on County Farm Road near both the Water Department and Maintenance Department's operations centers, and the close proximity to the school system's fueling station, there may be considerable advantages for both the County and the school system to join forces.

Mr. Sauer explained that when you consider the fueling for ambulances both gas and diesel, the benefits grow exponentially.

Mr. Ledford with the school transportation system coordinates the bulk fuel purchases and will need to play a key role in this discussion if the Board should want to pursue this item.

The consensus of the Board was to plan for this discussion with the Board of Education once the new Superintendent of Schools is in place.

School Bus Garage

County Manager Sauer reminded the Board that it was less than two months ago that the HCLA charter school floated the concept of using the old bus garage.

A discussion regarding joint fuel purchases might also present an opportunity to discuss other potential shared use of the school system's new vehicle maintenance facility.

Chairman Trent informed the Commissioners that Mr. Nick Shook was in discussion with the Board of Education regarding this matter.

County Manager Sauer also reminded the Board that it was suggested to HCLA leadership that the new CADA bus garage in Windsor might also present a collaborative opportunity to share this facility.

Bertie County Animal Shelter

County Manager Sauer reported that there are numerous compliance issues and facility concerns which will need to be addressed in order to avoid State inspection violations.

These issues are longstanding (neglected for many years) and should be considered and discussed with the Board as soon as practical.

County Manger Sauer stated that the County is blessed to have such a strong volunteer group through the Humane Society which keeps good working relations with both the State Veterinarian's office and the Animal Control Officers who work under the Sheriff's Office.

The consensus of the Board was to meet with Dianne Cowand of the Bertie County Humane Society and Skip Dunlow, Senior Animal Control Officer, to lay out a strategy, budget, and timeline to correct any infractions.

Martin Community College facility security

County Manager Sauer reported that just before Christmas, Norman Cherry called, seeking County guidance and support to develop enhanced security protocols for the Windsor site.

With each mass shooting across the country, the college is becoming mindful of the potential risks and liabilities regarding the lack of attention to this issue.

Mr. Sauer noted that fortunately, the Commissioners' efforts to plan and address the Courthouse and several County offices have kept this issue in focus for the Board.

Hertford County denial of non-emergency transports

County Manager Sauer reported that at present, Vidant Ahoskie is not allowing Bertie County NETS to transport patients from its facility to locations in Windsor, Greenville, or Elizabeth City which are not intra-county franchised transports.

The explanation from hospital staff is the Hertford County does not allow "outside" transport agencies to take patients out of the county unless they hold a current Hertford County transport franchise.

Mr. Sauer indicated that he believes that this stipulation and restriction is not valid under the NC General Statutes. The County Attorney is reviewing this matter, the County has also sought an interpretation of the General Statutes from the UNC School of Government.

Mr. Sauer stated that it is the County's understanding that ambulance transports which cross county lines are subject to the free market competition without restriction.

EMS Ambulance NCDMV titles

Assistant County Attorney, Clifton Smith, reported that there is a resolution for the two remaining units for FirstMed's fleet that have out-of-state plates.

Community Based Recreation

County Manager Sauer suggested that the Board of Commissioners evaluate how to improve the effectiveness of this initiative, plus building on efforts of existing programs through the County Parks & Recreation Department, the YMCA and other agencies such as the HIVE should be a continuing conversation as we plan for next year's budget.

In particular, Mr. Sauer reported that providing for the safe transportation of youth who participate in sports, recreation and after school activities throughout all areas of Bertie County is a considerable barrier for the effectiveness of this initiative.

There was considerable discussion regarding the potential use of County owned vehicles for this purpose and the liability issues that the Board should consider.

Other items for discussion

Commissioner White reported that that in light of the County's efforts to improve our water system, and with the recent news articles about the emergency situation in Flint, Michigan it may be helpful to have a water resources regional update from ECU's Dr. Richard Spruill at an upcoming work session.

County Manager Sauer reminded the Board of an ongoing request for a facility lease of office space for the Recidivism Reduction Program. Several concerns were reviewed and no action was taken.

County Manager Sauer reported that many employees have expressed interest for the availability of a "Shared leave policy."

Commissioner Lee indicated that the County should examine the State's policy and have it for the Board to review.

Commissioner White indicated that he would provide a copy of the Town of Ahsokie's policy to use for comparison as well.

Commissioner Lee made a **MOTION** to have the County proceed with developing a draft shared leave policy. Commissioner White **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

The Commissioners also expressed interest in clarifying the administration of the newly revised travel reimbursement policy.

Finance Officer William Roberson updated the Board on upcoming budget amendment required to cover legal fees for NC Property Tax Commission hearing preparations and related activities.

Economic Development Study

The Board of Commissioners last agenda item was to review the final draft report of the Economic Development System Evaluation and Organizational Analysis presented by Creative Consultants, INC.

As part of the study, Creative Consultants performed a “target cluster validation” of the County’s previously identified four business clusters explained Ms. Crystal Morphis and their recommendation to condense the County’s focus using a “mega” cluster approach:

- 1) Agriculture, Food and Energy
- 2) Waterfront Development, Tourism and Retirement

Chairman Trent explained that with the recommended economic development strategies in the energy sector and the grant opportunities for methane and poultry litter projects identified by our grant writer, it is very important that the County stay abreast of these issues. Also, he indicated that the County should continue to understand how the methane produced at our regional landfill which is operated by Republic Services, can provide business opportunities to attract other commercial development. Chairman Trent said that he has recently learned of an upcoming energy conference in Charlotte, NC which he would like to attend in April.

Each of the Commissioners had specific suggestions for completing this project and communicating the recommendations to the public.

The full report will be available on the County’s website.

In addition, the next phase of marketing and digital information for the Economic Development Program’s new internet domain is near completion and will be presented to the Board at an upcoming work session.

It was the consensus of the Board that there would be continued discussion regarding the implementation of these recommendations during the upcoming budget process.

The Board thanked the Creative staff members and Steve Biggs for their hard work on this important project.

ADJOURN

Chairman Trent adjourned the meeting at 2:45PM.

John Trent, Chairman

Sarah S. Tinkham, Clerk to the Board