

Windsor, North Carolina
October 29, 2019
WORK SESSION

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners met for a WORK SESSION today inside the Roanoke-Cashie River Center, Spivey Meeting Room, at 112 W. Water Street, Windsor, NC. The following members were present or absent:

Present: Ronald “Ron” Wesson, I
 Greg Atkins, II
 Tammy A. Lee, District III
 John Trent, District IV

Absent: Ernestine (Byrd) Bazemore, District V

Staff Present: County Manager Scott Sauer
 Assistant County Manager Juan Vaughan, II
 Assistant County Attorney Jonathan Huddleston
 Finance Director William Roberson
 Economic Development Director Steve Biggs

No media members were present.

Chairman Trent opened the meeting and noted that Commissioner Bazemore was not present. Commissioner Lee explained that Commissioner Bazemore had a medical appointment that conflicted with today’s meeting.

County Manager Sauer noted that Clerk to the Board, Sarah Tinkham, was coordinating open enrollment sessions Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in her expanded temporary role to assist with the staff coverage for the vacant Human Resources position.

Mr. Sauer noted that he and Mr. Vaughan were covering the minutes for this meeting and will be working to assist Ms. Tinkham with final components needed to distribute the November 4th agenda package by Thursday evening.

Review of November 4th agenda

Mr. Sauer distributed the draft agenda for the Board's next meeting and noted that the final package will be distributed on Thursday, October 31st.

Administrative, Budget and HR updates:

Audit for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2019 – and preparation of the MD&A

County Manager Sauer noted the two pages attached to the draft agenda, the first of which outlined the project expenditures and grant reimbursements pending as of June 30, 2019.

Finance Officer William Roberson explained that these items totaling \$1,047,072 will be treated as receivables and when combined with the recent expenditures for the revaluation project, the estimated drop in fund balance for the General Fund will reflect a decrease of a minimum of \$1.4 million for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2019. The new audit firm is working on the initial draft documents which have not yet been presented to management for review. Mr. Sauer noted that part of his role during the transitional consulting period will be to assist with preparation of the "management discuss and analysis" write up describing county operations in the audit report.

Commissioner Wesson stated that the Board needs to start working on the budget as soon as possible and that the Board's first goal should be to ensure that there is not a tax increase two years in a row. There was a discussion of various budget challenges and the potential savings anticipated due to continued staff vacancies.

Mr. Sauer noted that the Revaluation project is tracking on schedule, with the anticipated notice to property owners by February 2020 to present the new assessment values. Budget development for FY 2020-2021 will occur with the receipt of the final audit report and Mr. Vaughan has had a couple of brief discussions with Mr. Roberson and Mr. Sauer about the budget process.

On November 4th, Mr. Vaughan stated that during his report, the new Human Resources Director will be introduced and that the starting date will be November 25th.

Mr. Sauer noted that the second page attached to the draft agenda was a listing of publicly owned land tracts totaling 1,442 acres including the County's TGOW tracts (147 acres), Salmon Creek State Natural Area, and the 300 acres now under contract with the NC Coastal Land Trust. When the combined assessed property values are adjusted for the previous agricultural tax deferments, the revenue loss for the General Fund in property taxes is \$77,109 as reported by Tax Administrator Jodie Rhea. County Manager Sauer then referred the Board to review the green agenda packet containing summary information on the development of the Tall Glass of Water (TGOW) project.

There was a brief discussion led by Assistant County Attorney Jonathan Huddleston regarding the status of securing permanent easements and clearly defined access to NC 17, future Interstate 87. The Board confirmed its commitment to working with the NC Department of Transportation

to secure a Welcome Center located on County property to serve as the gateway to the outer banks.

Projects

Mr. Sauer reviewed progress to date on the TGOW initiative and provided comments highlighting the key role of Dr. Stan Riggs as outlined below:

Big Picture—“From the Rivers to the Sound in the Bertie Water Crescent” the first report presented by NC LOW

Bertie County’s leadership with property acquisition, and NCCLT and State of NC efforts that followed totaling 1,442 acres preserved on the Albemarle Sound. Dr. Riggs has stated that the Bertie County Board of Commissioners’ letter of support was a key factor in the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund decision to approve grant funding for 300 acre Bal Gra tract.

Dr. Riggs and NC LOW are taking the lead on the “Educational Component” with a focus on development of facilities on the Salmon Creek State Natural Area.

Dr. Riggs is also facilitating discussions with the NC Coastal Land Trust (NCCLT) regarding acquisition of Hoggard’s Mill Pond for flood control and historical preservation (eco-tourism too).

Dr. Riggs leading a high-level philanthropic campaign to assist the State with funding for a Cultural Heritage & Education Center at the Salmon Creek State Natural Area.

Additionally, Dr. Riggs is similarly engaged with raising funds to support the NCCLT’s effort to acquire property north of Colerain to preserve the high bluffs of the Wiccomoco Terrace on the Chowan River.

As the County seeks to implement recommendations from Dr. Riggs and his team, the County’s focus is on the “Recreational Component” in providing facilities, programming and activities for Bertie County residents, and to develop the eco-tourism and commercial aspects (NCDOT Welcome Center on I-87 and an upscale RV camping center for the travelers headed to the coast).

The County’s “Tall Glass of Water” project is rapidly developing with the organizational leadership of Ms. Robin Payne and efforts to enlist various regional support, stakeholders and partners.

The initial response to the request for qualifications (RFQ) for a project design team has been very strong, including multiple site visits. Proposals are due to the County on November 15th.

Mr. Sauer explained that the Board will need to schedule interviews with each firm and allow at least 90 minutes for presentations, plus questions and answers—similar to the RFQ process for

the library and cooperative extension project. He reported that the response to the site visit for interested design firms was very strong, with approximately twenty representatives in attendance. He also explained that when firms inquired about the project budget, it was explained and understood that the successful firm will be able to present both a phased project design meeting the Board's priorities, plus a financial plan to secure grant funds and other revenue sources. Mr. Sauer compared this engagement to the selection of Green Engineering for the water projects where the firm worked "at risk" while preparing the preliminary engineering report for the USDA Rural Development grant and financing for Water District III.

There was a brief discussion about the next cycle for the NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant process and the project support activities that Ms. Robin Payne will continue to assist the County with as the various phases of site development and programming are brought to completion—including tourism authority structure, marketing and establishment of a nonprofit organization to support this project.

The Board also discussed the archeological efforts planned for this fall by the First Colony Foundation on the County's TGOW property and Chairman Trent indicated that he will be attending a meeting with the First Colony Foundation at the River Center on November 6th.

Hurricane Matthew Recovery activities:

EMS Station One – Reimbursements pending from FEMA and NC Department of Commerce.

Library & Cooperative Extension with Community Room – under construction and on schedule.

HMPG – State Historic Preservation Office has five properties deferred for more than one year.

DRA 2017 – In process and Mr. Chris Hilbert with Holland Consulting Planners will be scheduled at an upcoming meeting to brief the Board in more detail.

During this review of Hurricane Matthew recovery activities, Mr. Sauer focused primarily on the Hurricane Matthew CDBG DR funding and noted that senior staff for the State Office of Resiliency & Recovery were on site on October 24 to explain the changes in the CDBG-DR program and the possibility of additional grant funds for Bertie County.

Meeting attendees: Norma Huston, UNC-SOG representing Laura Hogshead (Director NC ORR), Ivan Duncan, Chief Program Delivery Officer (NC ORR Construction Supervisor), Jonathan Doerr, NCDPS Deputy General Counsel (Lead Counsel for NC ORR), Chris Hilbert and Dale Holland, Holland Consulting Planners.

Bertie County--Scott Sauer, William Roberson, Steve Biggs, and Allen Castelloe, Windsor Town Administrator.

Mr. Sauer highlighted the recent events leading up to the meeting on October 24, 2019 as follows:

Norma Huston called Bertie County Manager Sauer late Friday July 12, 2019 and she reported that NC Office of Recovery and Resiliency had approved 3 applications for Bertie County under the CDBG-DR program. Mr. Sauer explained to Ms. Houston that prior to her telephone call there had been no communication from the NC Office of Resiliency and Recovery despite many efforts initiated by the County.

Mr. Sauer reminded the Board that Bertie County staff in addition to Commissioner Wesson attended the Recovery & Resiliency meeting at ECU August 28, 2019. Following the meeting at ECU, County staff met briefly with several NC ORR representatives requesting a site visit for Bertie County and the Town of Windsor.

Approximately six weeks later, Norma Huston called County Manager Sauer on October 12, 2019 to set a meeting to visit Bertie County. In the meantime, there had still been no formal communication from the NC ORR.

In the meantime, Chris Hilbert received a call from a County resident on Jack Branch Road indicating her property was approved for CDBG-DR funding, and had been told that Bertie County was the “hold-up.”

During the October 24, 2019 meeting with Ms. Norma Houston and the NC ORR staff, County Manager Sauer reminds the group that October 24th is an important date for Bertie County and NC EM’s Mary Glasscock held a Hurricane Matthew “hot spot” meeting two years earlier on October 24, 2017 to resolve outstanding recovery issues. Mr. Sauer reminded the group that Bertie County still has no grant agreement with the State for CDBG-DR. Bertie County submitted CDBG-DR application October 20th 2017 and receives Notice of Award letter December 13, 2017 for \$777,500 for rehabilitation and reconstruction of four residential properties, and temporary library leasing costs.

To date, the CDBG-DR grant agreement has not been approved by the State.

Norma Huston informed the County on 10-24-2019 that NC ORR has approved 68 applications for Bertie County and has sent 59 award letters to residents totaling \$5.97 million and there are 9 additional award letters “awaiting approval” in the amount of \$ 597,000 for a total of \$6.549 million. There are 7 applications “in process” for a total of 75 potential letters of award in Bertie County.

County Manager Sauer explained to Ms. Houston and the NC ORR representatives that Bertie County still has no communication from NC ORR detailing these application awards.

According to Ms. Houston, the NC ORR will be presenting Bertie County with a new grant agreement in the near future.

County Manager Sauer explained to the Board that when the NC ORR finally provided the County with access to the online CDBG-DR data base known as “Sales Force,” the applications which were approved were not in areas of the County impacted by flooding. One example from

the Lewiston-Woodville area was an application to repair plumbing for a home and roof replacement. He emphasized that residents impacted by Hurricane Matthew have been waiting for three years to receive assistance, and the NC ORR program is taking applications from other non-flood related properties.

Board should seriously consider utilizing all available CDBG-DR grant funds for acquisitions of property (buyouts) rather than rehab or reconstruction given the long list of unfunded buyout applications on file for HMGP which have not been funded on the approved list.

Mr. Sauer summarized that this portion of the recovery process (CDBG-DR) will require continued effort and persistence as the County must advocate on behalf of the citizens and families which have been displaced from their homes. Mr. Chris Hilbert of Holland Consulting Planners is scheduled to provide an update at the December Board meeting and he will have several recommendations for the Board to consider regarding the CDBG-DR grant administration process and reporting.

Mr. Sauer proceeded with a briefing which highlighted several project updates as follows:

Water System:

Construction phases now complete.

Asset & Inventory projects – two remaining, out of six (6) funded.

Water rate study has been initiated, and recommendations will be included in FY 2020-2021 proposed budget.

Training for System management reports and SCADA calibration is ongoing—and needs to be a priority for the department.

Other:

Blue Jay Recreation Center construction continues and grant reporting is pending for the \$80,000 state appropriation.

Animal Shelter – in an unrelated matter, a PETA representative was scheduled to visit Bertie County on Tuesday October 29th at 2:00 p.m. but called to cancel due to a conflict with their schedule.

Fire Service consultant study—Fire Association President Jodey Sary has been requested to provide list of priorities for this project.

Update on public safety radio communications--and future budget impact should be presented by Mitch Cooper before the budget process begins.

Software upgrades for Tax Office and Register of Deeds—and future budget impact are currently being evaluated by both departments.

Legal

Opioid litigation and response by the County regarding potential damages—There was significant discussion regarding the County’s efforts to provide data requested by the outside counsel and Jonathan Huddleston will be coordinating with various department heads about the information needed for the County’s request.

Republic Services – review of basic parameters for landfill host agreement should be scheduled in the very near future, including legal review. Assistant County Attorney Jonathan Huddleston reported that he and Lloyd Smith are following up on the Board’s earlier request to examine landfill host agreements between NC counties and other private regional landfills.

BMRJ Commission – County Manager Sauer noted that copies of recent correspondence prepared by the County Attorney is included as a handout in the Board packet for information and review.

Road Safety & Maintenance Ordinance – Mr. Sauer noted that property owners have been notified of violations and the timeline for compliance

NC Code Qualifications Board – Mr. Sauer noted that each Commissioner agenda packet contains documentation regarding recent disciplinary action and a voluntary settlement agreement (dated October 22, 2019) based on the complaint filed by Ms. Nekima Gilliam of 179 Cooper Hill Road. There was discussion with the Board about the impact of this issue for the residents of a newly constructed home and the potential damages incurred due to the poor quality of construction and the lack of adequate code enforcement and appropriate inspections. Management will continue to review this situation and bring a report to the Board.

Commissioner Lee noted that this was the final meeting for Mr. Sauer with the Board of Commissioners and thanked him for his service and hard work.

Commissioner Wesson made a **MOTION** to adjourn the work session. Commissioner **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

John Trent, Chairman

Sarah Tinkham, Clerk to the Board