

**Windsor, North Carolina
March 11, 2019
REGULAR SESSION**

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners met their regular meeting today inside the Commissioners Room, 106 Dundee Street, Windsor, NC. The following members were present or absent:

Present: Ronald "Ron" Wesson, District I
Greg Atkins, District II
Tammy A. Lee, District III
Ernestine (Byrd) Bazemore, District V

Absent: John Trent, District IV

Staff Present: County Manager Scott Sauer
Clerk to the Board Sarah Tinkham
County Attorney Lloyd Smith
Finance Officer William Roberson
Assistant to the County Manager Dominique Walker
Tax Administrator Jodie Rhea
Sheriff John Holley
DSS Director Cindy Perry
DSS Program Supervisor Vernetta Henderson
Emergency Services Director Mitch Cooper
Economic Development Director Steve Biggs

Junior Commissioners: Qudre Joyner

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

CALLED TO ORDER

Vice Chairman Atkins called the meeting to order.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/INVOCATION

Commissioner Bazemore led the Pledge of Allegiance and gave the Invocation.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Vivian Clarke of Windsor expressed her concerns with Bertie County's Department of Social Services in regards to hiring and the atmosphere some citizens have encountered while applying for services.

Brenda Cowand of Merry Hill reported that she had just won a bowling tournament in Fayetteville with a cash prize of \$200.

Lisa Bond of Windsor echoed the concerns of Ms. Clarke and stated that she was a former Bertie County DSS employee. She expressed her concerns with advancement opportunities within the organization.

Commissioner Ernestine Bazemore responded to the concerns presented about Bertie's DSS office by noting that the State has full control over the staff, and that the County does not have the authority or ability to take action within that agency.

There were no other public comments at this time.

APPOINTMENTS and Reports

(1) Public Hearing – Road Safety and Maintenance Ordinance

Before opening the public hearing, Vice Chairman Atkins asked the County Attorney to review the proposed ordinance. County Attorney Lloyd Smith explained that the proposed ordinance is based on a nuisance abatement structure to ensure that private roads are "passable" and free of holes. Notice will be given to property owners of these roads providing forty-five (45) days for abatement. If the road is not repaired, the County can arrange to have it fixed at the County's expense and a lien will be placed on the property.

Commissioner Bazemore shared her concerns with a \$1,000 per day penalty plus a lien on the property. She furthered explained that she did not think the County was prepared to enforce this ordinance.

Commissioner Wesson shared his view that this ordinance is needed. He stated that it is the right thing to do, and it is the right time to approve this ordinance. He reminded the Board that our

oath of office requires that we need to provide for the safety and welfare of our citizens. He explained that the land owner will be give the opportunity to fix the road, and that this is a safety ordinance.

Commissioner Lee shared that she felt the same way as Commissioner Bazemore and that she has done a lot of research. She indicated that Macon County had a similar ordinance and it did not work, and that she had two emails from UNC School of Government staff members saying that we cannot do this and that the nuisance abatement statutes do not apply.

Vice Chairman Atkins shared that he agreed with Commissioner Wesson.

County Attorney Smith stated that nobody can tell you the ordinance is not enforceable, and that he would place a ninety percent (90%) chance that it is enforceable. He explained that the imposition on the property owner is small compared to public safety. Mr. Smith further explained that if the Board is voting tonight, it will not pass if it is two “for” and two “against.”

After much discussion the Vice Chairman opened the public hearing for citizen comments.

Mr. Wayne Pierce of Pierce Lane asked the Board to take his little bit of taxes and fix my road just a little.

Ms. Vivian Clark of South King Street stated that these roads need to be repaired, but I am questioning the way you are going about how to fix them. She further stated that she agreed with Commissioners Bazemore and Lee.

Ms. Terry Pierce of Pierce Lane and Thomasville Road shared that she has collected letters of support from Sheriff John Holley, Emergency Services Director Mitch Cooper, Water Department Supervisor Ricky Spivey, and Roanoke Electric Cooperative in support of this proposed ordinance.

Mr. Jerry Cowand of Merry Hill stated that we have a problem and I am against this ordinance. He stated that this is public nuisance ordinance and not a public safety ordinance. He further explained that this is right-of-way issue and not a criminal issue, and that what you are doing is creating zoning within the County.

Mr. Gerald Adams stated that there are no signs for no trespassing, and that people are driving through residential yards to avoid pot holes.

Mr. Tim Bazemore Jr. stated that we are one of the poorest counties in the state, and that his father has trailer parks and keeps his roads up. He also explained that in the Woodard Road subdivision people share in the road repair.

Ms. Brandi Calvin stated that she feels sorry for these residents, and you should file a lawsuit to get your roads fixed.

Ms. Jennifer Mitchell speaking on behalf of her parents on Pierce Lane in support of the ordinance stating this is a safety issue.

Mr. Dick Ryan spoke in favor of the ordinance stating that he has a sick child who need EMS transport five times in the past year, and this family needs an EMS ambulance in a timely fashion.

Mr. Vernon Lee stated that he agrees with Ms. Clark and that he has sat in court enough to know and asked what training have you had to determine that a road is impassable? Do you have a motor grader? When is it impassable? He encouraged the Board to stop and think about what you are doing.

Mr. James Lee questioned using taxpayer dollars to maintain a private road and stated that more research needs to be done.

Commissioner Bazemore state her gratitude and thanks to all of the citizens for their input.

Commissioner Wesson offered additional clarification noting that if you are a lot owner, you do not have the authority to fix somebody's else's road. He emphasized that the County is not attempting to take over people's land, noting that the County's responsibility is to protect people.

Commissioner Lee thanked everyone for attending and shared that she had done a lot of research. She also noted that Cleveland County loans funds to improve roads.

Vice Chairman Atkins closed the public hearing at 7:30 p.m. and continued with the remainder of the regular meeting agenda.

(2) 2019 Relay for Life Update by Jo Ann Jordan

Ms. Jordan provided an update on the 2019 Relay for Life which will be held May 17th at the Roy Bond Stadium from 6:00 p.m. to midnight. She encouraged the public to attend, to register survivors and to purchase luminaries as memorials.

Ms. Jordan presented the Bertie County Board of Commissioners and Bertie County Emergency Management with the Purple Ribbon Award for the 2018 Relay for Life.

Ms. Jordan also presented the County with a framed certificate for the National Award for the 2018 Relay for Life Per Capita based on local contributions of \$226,782 or \$10.66 per capita. Bertie County was #1 in eastern North Carolina and #2 in the United States.

The Board thanked Ms. Jordan for dedication to Bertie County and for her leadership with the annual Relay for Life. Commissioner Wesson offered MOTION to approve the resolution and Commissioner Lee SECONDED the motion which passed be unanimous vote.

(3) Economic Development Report by Economic Development Director, Steve Biggs

Economic Development Director, Steve Biggs, was present to deliver an update about his latest projects on behalf of Bertie County.

He began by thanking the Board for their efforts in supporting his Economic Development Board members.

He noted that he is communicating with two different solar farms on potential projects. One company, Geenex, is looking to establish a 1,000-acre farm within the County. The goal was to have representatives from Geenex before the Board at an upcoming Board meeting. Permitting is almost complete for work to begin.

A second solar farm of 100 acres is also looking to occupy land in Bertie.

Mr. Biggs updated the Board regarding progress for the CDBG Broadband project, noting that the Mid-East Commission and Roanoke Electric Cooperative are working hard to move this effort forward.

On a similar note, Mr. Biggs noted a newly established relationship with RiverStreet Networks out of Wilkes County, NC. RiverStreet Networks is a company experienced with providing fast internet service to rural areas. He stated that he would be inviting representatives from the company back to the County so that they were able to see what possible services they could provide for our area.

Mr. Biggs reminded the Board about the upcoming visit to Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) to meet with the ECSU Chancellor about their newly established Aviation program.

The program allows students to enter either a mechanical aviation or pilot course plan for less cost than other leading universities with similar programs. This is a partnership with the University of North Carolina.

Mr. Biggs also reported about "Project Bunny," which is a project the Board recently learned about in Closed Session. He stated that communication on this project was still in progress, and more information will be provided to the Board soon.

Within the next month, it was noted by Mr. Biggs that a final decision would be received from a pharmacy looking to occupy an empty storefront in the Food Lion Shopping Center in Windsor.

Per a conversation with Lynn Minges, President and CEO of NC Restaurants and Lodging Association, Mr. Biggs noted that 55 million people had visited NC in 2018. She provided statistical information showing that when there is an increased percentage in State tourism, NC

counties also benefit from the same percentage in tourism. He said this could provide a huge benefit to the County once the “tall glass of water” property is complete.

Mr. Biggs also introduced a new hiring site that will be utilized by manufacturing jobs only, RampEast.

Additionally, Mr. Biggs shared that he will be meeting with the NC General Assembly’s Chairman of the Senate Rules Committee in the coming week to discuss the local legislation for the Teacher Housing Initiative.

(4) Bryant Buck, Executive Director of the Mid-East Commission, will present the CENSUS 2020 timeline, outreach, and overall process of the upcoming data collection cycle

Due to a scheduling conflict Mr. Buck’s report was presented by the U.S. Department of Commerce 2020 Census Partnership Specialist, Ms. Bernadette Richards. Ms. Richards explained the importance of increasing Bertie County’s participation in the 2020 U.S. Census which will officially begin April 1st. She further explained that her office will support outreach efforts for recruiting paid staff and volunteers in Bertie County. County Manager Sauer noted that Ms. Dominique Walker will serve as the lead contact for the County in the 2020 Census.

(5) Bertie County Communications Survey report by Assistant to the County Manager, Dominique Walker

Assistant to the County Manager, Dominique Walker, presented a PowerPoint report detailing a recent survey conducted in Bertie County among various citizen groups. The survey’s goal was to receive information on how County citizens receive news and updates from their County government.

The survey found that a majority of citizens still receive their news from the County via word of mouth followed by the local newspapers and County Facebook page.

She also provided several recommendations to the Board on how increase their reach and provide more opportunities for citizens to reach their elected leaders directly with any concerns.

(6) 2018 Tax Report by Tax Administrator, Jodie Rhea

Tax Administrator, Jodie Rhea, was present to answer any questions the Board may have about the action items submitted for the Board’s review under the Consent Agenda.

He also noted that 2018 tax rate is 97.29%. Each of the Commissioners congratulated Mr. Rhea and his staff for this achievement.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Voluntary Agricultural District Board

Commissioner Bazemore made a **MOTION** to appoint Curtis Brown, Herbert “Herbie” Tayloe, Carl Bond, and Shelby Castelloe to the Voluntary Agricultural District Board. Commissioner Lee **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Minutes for Regular Meeting 2-4-19, Planning Session 2-18-19, Special Meeting 2-21-19, Closed Session 2-4-19 and 2-18-19
2. Register of Deeds Fees Report – February 2019
3. Tax Department Release Journal – January 2019, February 2019
4. Tax Administrator’s Reports & Requests: report of total unpaid taxes for FY2017-2018 Real & Personal Property as required by N.C.G.S. 105-369, approval of “Order to Advertise the 2018 Tax Liens” – pursuant to N.C.G.S. 105-369, Establish April 1, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. for the Board of Commissioners to convene as the Board of Equalization and Review
5. Budget Amendment(s)
6. **Resolution** - approving land exchange between Bertie County and Cashie Golf & Country Club
7. **Report** - Settlement for the Department of Social Services re: Latria Norman
8. **Project Change Order** - Bertie County Regional Water System – WIF 1897 installation of chlorine detection units with remaining project funds available.
9. **Work Authorization** - Hurricane Matthew NC-DRA17, No. 4 for Holland Consulting Planners through June 30, 2019.
10. **Project ordinance and revised grant agreement** - Golden LEAF Foundation – combining project No. FY2017-207 and FY2017-204.
11. **Resolution** - protect Lower Roanoke River Basin from unnecessary flooding

Commissioner Lee made a **MOTION** to approve the Consent Agenda in its entirety. Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

DISCUSSION AGENDA

TGOW – Proposed action plan for project implementation to include community visioning, temporary access, planning and grant funding consulting services

County Manager Sauer discussed that the Board prepare for an upcoming Work Session focusing on the “Tall Glass of Water” and developing the implementation plan to provide public access to the Albemarle Sound beach area. Mr. Sauer also noted that the outline prepared by Ms. Robin Payne provides for several key benchmarks including visioning, branding (naming the project site location) and developing a steering committee to guide the citizen outreach and planning efforts.

COMMISSIONERS’ REPORTS

Commissioner Lee shared her experience attending the Alcohol Forum in Raleigh with legislators discussing the ABC system and possibly privatization. She stated that privatization is not looking like a good option for the state. She shared her excitement of attending the first annual Criminal Justice Summit. She introduced a resolution recognizing the Town of Powellsville and its centennial and indicated that the Town was having a celebration on March 16, 2019 at 10AM. She made a **MOTION** to adopt the resolution recognizing the Town of Powellsville and its centennial. Commissioner Wesson **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Commissioner Wesson thanked citizens and staff for being able to attend the NACo Legislative Conference in Washington D.C. to meet with legislators and commissioners all over the country. He shared a Labor Market Overview handout from the Mideast Commission and stated that he will now serve as the Vice-President of the Commission.

Commissioner Bazemore shared her experience in Washington D.C. Some of the topics discussed at the conference included Medicaid expansion, and the need for broadband. She shared a new initiative called TestIt, an app that can test broadband speeds. The 2020 Census was also discussed at the Conference and she shared the importance of making sure residents understand the significance of the Census. She indicated that the Board should have a town hall

meeting to discuss the Census and the beginning stages of the Complete Count Committee (CCC).

Commissioner Atkins had no reports at this time.

JUNIOR COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Qudre Joyner commented on the Road Provision stating that it was much needed but “mediocre” and asked for clarification on “lien”. He suggested that the County send out surveys to citizens and for the Board to provide more research regarding the Provision. He inquired about the maintenance of public roads in the County. Commissioner Wesson explained that highways are maintained by NCDOT but there is a local NCDOT project priority list for the County. Qudre gave insight on the need for broadband internet, especially for the Census, and to communicate with his age group. He apologized on behalf of his counterpart’s absence, stating that there was a sudden family emergency.

COUNTY MANAGER’S REPORTS

The County Manager had no remarks at this time.

COUNTY ATTORNEY’S REPORTS

The County Attorney had no remarks at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jerry Cowand, II followed up about his earlier comments by stating that he had an “eye opening experience” at tonight’s meeting, and that he knew the citizens of the County truly had no idea of the time that is required to serve as a Commissioner. He thanked the Board for their service and shared that he was grateful to the Board, and closed by stating that he would continue to pray for them as they continue their service to the County.

ADJOURN

Vice Chairman Atkins **ADJOURNED** the meeting at 9:00 PM.

Greg Atkins, Vice Chairman

Sarah S. Tinkham, Clerk to the Board