

Windsor, North Carolina
June 1, 2020
REGULAR MEETING

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners met for a REGULAR MEETING today inside the Commissioners Room, 106 Dundee Street, Windsor, NC. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was hosted partially in person, and partially via Zoom (conference call). The following members were present or absent:

Present: Ronald “Ron” Wesson, District I
Greg Atkins, District II
Tammy A. Lee, District III
John Trent, District IV
Ernestine (Byrd) Bazemore, District V (**Zoom**)

Absent: None

Staff Present: County Manager Juan Vaughan, II.
Assistant County Attorney Jonathan Huddleston
Finance Director William Roberson

Staff Present (Zoom): Clerk to the Board Sarah Tinkham
Emergency Services Director Mitch Cooper
Tax Administrator Jodie Rhea

Cal Bryant of the Roanoke-Chowan News Herald and Thadd White of the Bertie-Ledger Advance were present from the media via Zoom.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Wesson welcomed the limited staff present and thanked those on the phone via Zoom for their participation.

It was also encouraged that any questions be submitted via the Zoom chat feature. All questions will be answered periodically throughout the meeting.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner John Trent gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPOINTMENTS & REPORTS

Coronavirus Pandemic Update by Battle Betts, Albemarle Regional Health Services Executive Director

Battle Betts acknowledged several staff members present on the phone from Albemarle Regional Health Services, as well as from partnering hospitals. He also noted Ashely Stoop was present to provide a quick update.

Ms. Stoop noted that at the time of this report, a total of 122 Bertie residents had been diagnosed with COVID-19 since March 11th. Currently, 11 of those cases are active with 4 deaths, and the remaining cases are listed as recoveries.

Serious strides have been made in preventing the spread, and thankfully the County had only sustained a small number of “outbreaks” in large employers as well as nursing homes. She commended the Bertie County COVID-19 Taskforce for their commitment to distributing valuable information, and promoting the Governor’s initiatives.

She reported that Phase 2 should last about 5 weeks taking the state into the latter part of June. She also noted that ARHS is prioritizing containment and contact tracing, as well as addressing the needs that arise during any outbreaks.

New waves of the pandemic are expected between the various containment and mitigation strategies as the State continues to move through Phase 2 and Phase 3.

Testing is being encouraged to anyone with symptoms especially through commercial lab settings to better alleviate the burden on the State lab.

Guidance does continue to change based on the availability of resources and nature of the coronavirus as it continues to evolve.

Serious illness and complications are still being seen in the population over the age of 65. Citizens experiencing symptoms are still encouraged to contact their primary care doctors first so that they are able to see where testing is available.

For those who do test positive for COVID-19, they will hear from their local health department and be informed of valuable information to protect their health, as well as the health of those in their community. Any immediate needs will be addressed before their quarantine begins, and the health department team will inquire about their latest activities, and whom they have been in contact with over the last several days. Those individuals will then be contacted to self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for a period of 14-days.

Ms. Stoop also addressed whether or not repeat lab testing is needed to deem a patient recovered from COVID-19. The guidance includes: has it been at least 10 days since symptoms began? Has a fever been present within the last 3 days without fever medications? Have symptoms improved? If the answer to all three questions is yes, then normal activities may be resumed.

It is still the recommendation for those infected, or showing signs of any illness, to remain at home to help prevent the spread. It is also encouraged to continue to receive reliable information about the virus, as well as to check in with children, older relatives, and be in contact during the time of physical distancing.

ARHS is also now providing a COVID-19 hotline that can be reached at 252-338-WELL (9355).

Mr. Betts answers how deaths are attributed when a Bertie resident passes away outside of Bertie County at a hospital or other location. It was noted that in most cases, the death is attributed to the home county, so the county of residence. Some exceptions are present including in congregate living environments. In the case of congregate living facilities, however, COVID-19 related deaths are attributed to the county in which the facility is located. No explanation was given as to why this may be. Also, contact tracing was discussed further.

Currently, mass testing is not being recommended, however members of vulnerable populations are being prioritized. A testing event for Bertie County is being scheduled, and more information will be available soon.

Commissioner Bazemore inquired if gloves were recommended during day to day activities. Mr. Betts strongly encouraged face coverings and hand washing more than the use of gloves. Gloves, if not used properly, can present many opportunities for cross contamination. Washing hands as often as possible is the best way to prevent the spread of germs and to help prevent infection.

Chair Wesson commended Ms. Stoop and Mr. Betts for their report and guidance, and noted that the public will receive much more COVID-19 related information in tomorrow's Virtual Town Hall at 7:00 PM.

Bertie County Library/Cooperative Extension Facility Update by Amber Idol and Dani Hoff, MHA Works

Ms. Idol discussed the latest construction updates for the Bertie County Library/Cooperative Extension facility.

The following monthly report was discussed:



**A.R. CHESSON
CONSTRUCTION CO., INC.**

www.archesson.com
Toll Free: 800-849-4486

Williamston Office:
PO Box 1147
315 W. Main St.
Williamston, NC 27892
252-792-4486 Fax 252-792-9090

**Bertie County Library Progress Meeting
May 20, 2020**

Passed 30 Days

- Complete Den-glass
- Install/prep for air barrier.
- Finish priming and first coat of paint on structural trusses
- Started electrical rough-in
- Started on structural wood decking
- Poured mezzanine floor
- Metal stud framing
- Blocking for cabinets and bathroom accessories
- Installed brackets for canopies

Next 30 Days

- Continue working on structural wood decking
- Complete mechanical and plumbing rough ins
- Complete in wall electrical rough in at Cooperative Ex. area.
- Start exterior rigid insulation board
- Block & Brick delivery to be on site
- Complete brick sample panel
- Start on polish block Masonry

Estimated completion date as of today's date is November 13, 2020, but could be as late as Thanksgiving 2020. Weather delays are expected in the coming months, and COVID-19 has impacted the ability for some work to be done on the desired schedule.

Reconvene as Board of Equalization & Review by Tax Administrator Jodie Rhea

Chair Wesson welcomed Jodie Rhea, Tax Administrator, on the phone for the next report.

The Board also needed a motion to convene as the Board of Equalization & Review.

Vice Chair Lee made a **MOTION** for the Board to convene as the Board of Equalization & Review. Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Mr. Rhea noted that Lynne Stalls was present on the phone tonight to discuss her appeal that consists of three (3) appeals.

Due to technological challenges, Ms. Stalls also submitted a letter detailing her position. At this time, the Board gave Ms. Stalls the chance to state her case. Ms. Stalls' phone number was listed as being signed in, but upon unmuting, no sound could be heard from her phone line.

In the meantime, Chair Wesson requested that Mr. Rhea briefly summarize the appeal.

Mr. Rhea reaffirmed his position that the County had appropriately valued the parcels in question.

Upon no response on the phone from Ms. Stalls, the Board agreed to temporarily postpone the ruling of her appeal. She was also contacted via phone by the Clerk to the Board. However, the Board did close the door on hearing new appeals.

There were no other matters to consider as the Board of Equalization and Review.

Vice Chair Lee made a **MOTION** for the Board to adjourn as the Board of Equalization & Review. Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Presentation of proposed budget FY 2020-2021 budget plan by County Manager Juan Vaughan, II

County Manager Juan Vaughan, II welcomed those present in person and via Zoom, and also presented his budget message for the FY2020-2021 Budget.

He began by discussing the County’s revenue neutral which is required during revaluation years. The document presented is below:



FY 2020-2021 BERTIE COUNTY REVENUE-NEUTRAL TAX RATE CALCULATION

In a property revaluation year, the North Carolina General Statute 159-11(e) requires local governments to calculate the revenue-neutral property tax rate for comparative purposes.

Steps in Determining the Revenue-Neutral Rate

- Step 1:** Determine a rate that would produce revenues equal to those produced for the current fiscal year (tax levy).
- Step 2:** Increase the rate by a growth factor equal to the average annual percentage increase in the tax base due to improvements since the last general reappraisal.
- Step 3:** Adjust the rate to account for any annexation, de-annexation, merger, or similar event.

NCGS 159-11(e) - In each year in which a general reappraisal of real property has been conducted, the budget officer shall include in the budget, for comparison purposes, a statement of revenue-neutral property tax rate for the budget. The revenue-neutral property tax rate is the rate that is estimated to produce revenue for the next fiscal year equal to the revenue that would have been produced for the next fiscal year by the current tax rate if no appraisal had occurred. To calculate the revenue-neutral tax rate, the budget officer shall first determine a rate that would produce revenues equal to those produced for the current fiscal year and then increase the rate by a growth factor that would produce revenues equal to those produced for the current fiscal year and then increase the rate by a growth factor equal to the average annual percentage increase in the tax base due to the improvements since the last general appraisal. This growth factor represents the expected percentage increase in the value of the tax base due to improvements during the next fiscal year. The budget officer shall further adjust the rate to account for any annexation, de-annexation, merger, or similar event.

Step 1: Determine a rate that would produce revenues equal to those produced for the current fiscal year.

FY 2020 Projected Total Valuation before Revaluation	\$1,317,135,942
FY 2020 Tax Rate	\$0.8650
Tax Levy at FY 2019 rate without revaluation = (\$1,317,135,942/100) x 0.865	\$11,393,226
FY 2021 Projected Total Valuation	\$1,382,385,051
Tax Rate That Would Produce Revenue Equal to FY 2020 = \$11,393,226/(\$1,382,385,051/100)	\$0.8242

Step 2: Increase the rate by a growth factor equal to the average annual percentage increase in the tax base due to improvements since the last general appraisal.

FY	Assessed Value	Percent Change
2013	\$1,217,288,729	
2014	\$1,271,018,233	4.41%
2015	\$1,274,110,118	0.24%
2016	\$1,311,113,199	2.90%
2017	\$1,340,162,306	2.22%
2018	\$1,321,583,373	-1.39%
2019	\$1,321,922,163	0.03%
2020	\$1,317,135,942	-0.36%
Average Growth		1.15%

FY 2021 Revenue Neutral Rate (1.15% Growth Factor Applied) = 0.8242 * 1.0115	\$0.8336
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Step 3: Not Applicable to Bertie County.

The proposed funding for the General Fund for FY 2020-2021 is \$24,755,534 which is a decrease of \$736,370 or 3% below the original budget ordinance for the current year, which was \$25,491,904. The proposed General Fund budget does not include a fund balance appropriation nor an increase in the proposed ad valorem tax rate. The County could benefit from a number of capital requests; however, due to the limited amount of available funds, many requests are not included in the proposed budget.

County Manager Vaughan noted that it was possible to balance the proposed budget with no appropriation of fund balance and no recommended tax increase for a number of reasons, including the growth of our tax base due to revaluation. The Board of Commissioners contracted for a mass appraisal project to reassess all real property as required by North Carolina General Statute 105-286 using an octennial revaluation schedule. Prior to the latest appraisal conducted this fiscal year, the real property in Bertie County was last reassessed as of January 1, 2012. After revaluation this year, the total valuation projection for FY 2020-2021 is \$1,382,385,051, which is \$65,249,109 (4.7%) higher than the FY 2019-2020 projected total valuation of \$1,317,135,912. At a collection rate of 100%, each penny produces \$138,238.51. At the collection rate of 97.06% reached in FY 2018-2019, each penny produces \$134,174.29.

As it relates to expenditures, the budgets of most county departments were reduced by at least 5%. The budgets for a number of departments were decreased significantly more than 5% while only a few had very little change. Departments such as Finance and Veteran's Services have small budgets with very few areas for reducing expenditures.

In efforts of reducing expenditures to alleviate further use of fund balance to balance the budget, several positions were not funded in departments with numerous vacancies. For example, the proposed budget includes no funding for the five deputy positions in the Sheriff's department that were frozen for the current fiscal year. Similarly, there were also five positions in Non-Emergency Transport that are not absolutely necessary based on the call volume at this time; thus, these positions have not been included in the proposed budget.

County staff and department heads are prepared to explain funding requests and to assist the Board with balancing priorities within our fiscal limits. The final adoption of the FY 2020-2021 budget is anticipated to occur between June 15 and June 30, 2020. We will continue to work diligently with Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams & Co. to finalize the audit ending June 30, 2019 as this is a necessary component of planning and making budgetary decisions in the future.

Chair Wesson commended the Finance Officer and County Manager for presenting a balanced budget without utilizing the County's fund balance. There's also additional possibility of funding from the State of NC to make up for lost county revenue which would boost the budget further for next fiscal year.

Commissioner Lee inquired about a timeframe for when the final audit could be received by the County. Mr. Vaughan noted that he would be receiving an update from the auditing firm tomorrow, and more information would be shared soon.

Finance Officer William Roberson noted that he did not expect a significant drop in sales tax revenue, but that this year's proposed budget reflects a very conservative outlook.

For more information on the proposed budget, please visit:

<http://www.co.bertie.nc.us/departments/finance/budgets/2021/2021budget.html>

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

ABC Board

Chair Wesson noted an additional individual who is seeking appointment to the ABC Board.

There was a brief discussion about Mr. Pugh's reappointment as well as consideration of the new candidate.

Commissioner Trent made a **MOTION** to reappoint Mr. Pugh to the ABC Board for an additional term. Vice Chair Lee **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve Minutes for Regular Meeting 5-4-20
2. Approve Minutes for Special Meeting 5-18-20
3. Approve Minutes for Recessed Special Meeting 5-20-20

Vice Chair Lee made a **MOTION** to approve Consent Items #1-3. Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

4. Approve Resolution for Abandonment of Billup Club Road

Chair Wesson made a **MOTION** to approve this resolution as presented pending the needed NCDOT verification and finalization process. Vice Chair Lee **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

5. Approve Partial Release of the Development Agreement between Bertie County and FC Bal Gra, LLC.

Vice Chair Lee made a **MOTION** to approve the partial release of the development agreement between Bertie County and FC Bal Gra, LLC. Commissioner Atkins **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

6. Approve Register of Deeds Fees Report – May 2020

Vice Chair Lee made a **MOTION** to approve the Register of Deeds Fees Report for May 2020. Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

DISCUSSION AGENDA

Budget Amendments & Updates from Finance Director William Roberson

Finance Director, William Roberson, noted several budget amendments.

Vice Chairman Lee made a **MOTION** to approve both budget amendments. Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

The budget amendments reads as follows:

Virtual Town Hall scheduled for June 2nd

Chair Wesson reminded all of those present about the Virtual Town Hall scheduled for tomorrow, Tuesday, June 2nd. The event will last just over 30 minutes, and several local representatives will present to the public. Governor Cooper will provide remarks, as well as Sheriff Holley, Dr. Smallwood from Bertie County Public Schools, and a COVID-19 survivor, among others. The virtual town hall may be viewed online via Facebook Live or on Zoom. Information was also mailed to every household in the county.

Chair Wesson commended the Bertie County COVID-19 Taskforce for their hard work on this project.

Commissioner's budget work session – date confirmation

The Board confirmed that Thursday, June 4th at 10:00 AM was suitable for a budget work session. Zoom will also be available.

Census 2020 Update – response rates by municipality

The latest response rates are as follows:

National	60.2%
NC	56.5%
Bertie County	44.5%
Askewville	66.4%
Aulander	19.8%
Colerain	45.0%
Kelford	16.3%
LWDV	15.4%
Powellsville	11.8%
Roxobel	25.8%
Windsor	54.3%

The phone number to complete the survey in English: 1-844-330-2020

The phone number to complete the survey in Spanish: 1-844-468-2020

The website to complete the survey online (without a code): 2020Census.gov.

Blue Jay Recreation Center Updates and plans for Grand Opening

Maintenance Director, Anthony Rascoe, noted that the walking track is still very popular first thing in the morning, and last thing in the evening.

He noted that there were a few challenges still ahead for the Recreation Center before the grand opening can be officially scheduled.

County Manager Vaughan noted that once the certificate of occupancy is received, a grand opening could be scheduled for the near future. He noted that the Board was welcome to present their ideas about a grand opening event for later on into Phase 3 of the reopening.

Commissioner Bazemore noted that she would like to see the grand opening event well attended, and to ensure Governor Roy Cooper was invited.

Commissioners' Reports (E)

Commissioner Bazemore

Commissioner Bazemore noted her attendance at the electronic County Assembly Day.

She also announced that on June 20th, there would be a COVID-19 & Antibody Screening event located at 322 School Road in Windsor.

The Windsor Farmer's Market is also due on Friday, June 5th.

The suggestion was also made for the County to consider sending a flyer out to all households similar to the virtual town hall. The flyer could provide the needed information for citizens to complete their 2020 Census. County Manager Vaughan and Finance Officer Roberson noted that funds could be available to do this including through grants or other forms of funding.

Vice Chair Lee

Vice Chair Lee also noted her attendance at the electronic County Assembly Day.

She also noted that an in-person meeting was held at the Tri-County Airport, and that the new terminal building is coming along with an expected completion timeframe of mid-November.

The mobile food pantry will be in the Town of Powellsville at 11:00 AM tomorrow, Tuesday, June 5th.

Commissioner Trent

Commissioner Trent gave no remarks at this time.

Commissioner Atkins

Commissioner Atkins gave no remarks at this time.

Chairman Wesson

Chair Wesson noted a rather large magnolia tree a mile outside of Windsor. The tree may be the largest magnolia tree in the State of NC. A determination should be received from the State soon. Chair Wesson also noted that County had invested in video equipment to provide access to citizens to view County meetings on Facebook Live.

County Manager's Reports (F)

Mr. Vaughan inquired if the Board would like to extend their policy in concurrence with Governor Cooper's Executive Order about the suspension of cut offs due to non-payment of utilities.

Chairman Wesson made a **MOTION** for the County to stay in line with Governor Cooper's Executive Order regarding utility payments, late fees, suspension in any utility cut offs, and the absorption of convenience fees for those who choose to pay online. The extension would be in place until June 31, 2020 which coincides with Governor Cooper's order. Vice Chair Lee **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

County Attorney's Reports (G)

The County Attorney had no remarks at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments submitted online via Zoom chat, Facebook post, or via email to the Clerk to the Board.

Terry Pratt noted his displeasure with how the Governor and local governments have been handling the COVID-19 pandemic. He spoke about how facing this virus would have to happen sooner or later, and that if he becomes sickened, it would be due to his own choices and not others. He also mentioned that he had no further plans to live based on the latest recommendations from the CDC.

Chair Wesson thanked Mr. Pratt for his thoughts and stated that he was entitled to his opinion even though it did not correspond with the national and state health authorities.

CLOSED SESSION

Vice Chair Lee made a **MOTION** to go into Closed Session pursuant **N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(6)** to consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of employment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee; or to hear or investigate a complaint, charge, or grievance by or against an individual public officer or employee. Commissioner Atkins **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

The Board shifted into Closed Session.

Commissioner Trent made a **MOTION** to return to Open Session. Vice Chair Lee **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Before recessing, Vice Chair Lee noted that she had received another complaint about the Rosemead convenience site. Complaints about overflowing trash containers are consistently being received from citizens. Some sites are also having issues with staff members attending work as scheduled which impacts the hours of operation of some convenience sites.

RECESS

Chair Wesson recessed this meeting until Thursday, June 4th at 10:00 AM for a Budget Work Session.

Ronald Wesson, Chairman

Sarah Tinkham, Clerk to the Board