

**Windsor, North Carolina**  
**September 9, 2024**  
**REGULAR SESSION**

The Bertie County Commissioners met in Regular Session at 6:00 PM inside the Commissioners room, 106 Dundee Street, Windsor, NC. Because of 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: Corey Ballance, Sr., District III  
John Trent, District, IV  
Ronald “Ron” Roberson, District V

Absent: Ronald “Ron” Wesson, District I  
Michael White, District II

Staff Present: County Manager, Juan Vaughan, II  
Assistant County Manager David Scarborough  
Assistant County Attorney Jonathan Huddleston  
Clerk to the Board Joleatha Chestnutt

Staff Present (Zoom): Information Technology Director Joseph Wilkes

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Trent called the meeting to order.

**INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chairman Trent gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Rachel Bellis

Rachel Bellis reported to the Board of Commissioners that she works with PETA. PETA is an organization with 159,000 animal support members. Ms. Bellis shared three different dog pictures described as poor living conditions. She stated the first dog’s name was Juliet who is chained 24/7 in poor living conditions. The dogs DG and Hazel live on the same property with very little shelter, food, and water.

Ms. Bellis asked the Board of Commissioners to pass an ordinance that would ban chaining an animal.

Commissioner Roberson thanked Ms. Bellis for her report. Commissioner Roberson emphasized on how the community needs to be educated about the system.

Jean Kozochuk

Jean Kozochuk expressed concerns of response time of EMS for E911 calls. She reported to the Board of Commissioners she had been present at 3 out of 5 E911 calls; and that, they had to wait well over (25) twenty-five minutes. Ms. Kozochuk informed the Board that she has been in emergency services for over 30 years. She stated, “She would like to work with whomever she can to help address the response time.”

Commissioner Trent responded that he understands her concerns about this issue. He has had several conversations with EMS and the County Manager and this will be addressed. Commissioner Trent explained to Ms. Kozochuk the call will go straight to Bertie County Dispatch, Bertie County EMS, and the Sheriff’s Office.

Commissioner Trent reported that 741 square miles is the coverage area for three ambulances per shift for Bertie County. It has improved immensely over the years and Bertie County strives to give equal and fair service to all citizens.

Ms. Kozochuk stated she is willing to volunteer her services to educate the community.

Commissioner Roberson recommended that Ms. Kozochuck contact the County Manager.

David Hoffer

David Hoffer Bertie County Ranger gave an update on the North Carolina Forest Service.

David Hoffer reported that this year Bertie NCFS office has continued to sustain major staffing changings. Trent Munford promoted from Assistant County Ranger to Service Forester at the beginning of the fiscal year and 2 new Assistant County Rangers were hired. Although Trent was promoted to the District level, Bertie County is one of his areas of responsibility which also includes Camden and Chowan. One of the Assistant County Ranger positions which had been vacant since April 2023 was filled in January by Alexis Marshall. Second, Ally Jo Salomon was hired in April. Currently their office is fully staffed and includes County Ranger, Forest Fire Equipment operator Jack Keller, Assistant county Ranger All Jo Salomon, Assistant County Ranger Alexis Marshall and Smoke-chaser Ahmad Vaughan.

Alexis and Ally Jo are one-third of the way through the 18-month Ranger Training Program. Ranger Training consists of comprehensive training in forest management with formal classes in Forestation, Area Mapping, Forest Measurements, Forest Health (insect and Disease), Water Quality and Urban Forestry. Dave Hoffer reported he has completed his Ranger training Final which consisted of a final written test and an all-day field exam in December.

## **Fire Control and Emergency Response**

This year Bertie County experienced a below average fire season statistically. On average, Bertie County experiences 36 wildfires per year, with an average of 126 acres burned each year. However, this year, Bertie County had a total of 26 wildfires totaling 116 acres burned with 18 warning tickets issued. One of the notable fires in Bertie this year was the chicken house fire that burned over 50 acres. This fire exhibited complexities and resulted in substantial resource needs. Three tractor plow units from Bertie, Hertford, and Martin County, 4 crewmen, an Incident Commander and a Drone/Operator were called to the fire. Without efficient collaboration between local fire departments and the NCFS, much more land would have been burned this year.

The volunteer and paid fire departments across the County prove to be an invaluable asset in assisting with wildland fire suppression. The NCFS strives to support these departments through grants and assistance programs, as well as providing wildland fire suppression trainings. Additionally, the NCFS works closely with the Bertie County Emergency Management Coordinator and helps with all types of disaster preparedness and response.

## **Forest Management**

The majority of Bertie County's land area is classified as privately-owned timberland (72%) which totals 315,133 acres according to the NC State Extension. Additionally, Bertie County is consistently ranked as one of the top counties in the state in income of timber harvested and delivered to mills. The NCFS offers many different forest management related services to the landowners of Bertie County. This year, a total of 55 management plans were written for landowners, encompassing 2,999 acres. A forest management plan addresses timber resources, water quality, soils, and other factors. The management plan provides a landowner with forest management recommendations that align with their specific objectives, whether it be timber production, forest regeneration, wildlife habitat management, or aesthetic value. Forest management plans ensure landowner can make informed decisions to meet their goals.

To help promote forest management within the County, the NCFS carries out cost-share programs that help offset costs for eligible landowners to improve their land. This year, through the Forest Development Program, Florence Restoration Fund, Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Program, and the Prescribed Burning Program a total of \$120,265 were provided to landowners in Bertie County.

## **Water Quality Protection**

In the state of North Carolina, all forestry activities are required to adhere to the Forest Practice Guidelines related to water quality. To ensure compliance the NCFS regularly patrols for logging operations and inspects them in order to protect the water quality of Bertie County. Best Management Practices are recommended to loggers and assessment is carried out during inspections to ensure that water quality is not being degraded. This year, 46 logging operation sites were inspected, covering a total of 4,182 acres.

## **Information and Education (I&E)**

This year the Bertie County NCFS staff participated in 20 I&E events in Bertie. The staff participated in parades, community events, forest management tours, career days, touch a truck and Smokey visits to the schools. Additionally, the NCFS helps coordinate and lead the annual Bertie County Forest Landowners Association meeting, which was very successful with over 100 attendees. The meeting is an excellent venue for the NCFS to pass information to Bertie residents about Forest Management, Cost-share programs available current fire updates, and many other resources.

## **Urban Assistance and Pest Control**

The NCFS provides assistance and guidance regarding urban tree, insect, and disease concerns. Our agency also actively monitors for insect and disease outbreaks through aerial and ground surveys. Additionally, we maintain communication with cooperative agencies to continuously track forest pest movements including tracing the movements of invasive forest pest such as the Emerald Ash Borer. This spring the presence of the Emerald Ash Borer in Bertie County was upgraded from suspected to confirmed. This helps aid landowners to make important decisions in the management of their timber that comprises of various species of Ash trees.

## **Conclusion**

The above-mentioned accomplishments were achieved through a continuing support from the County, local fire departments, and many other cooperating agencies. The Bertie County NCFS office will continue to deliver safe and effective wildland fire control, provide expert forest management advice, protect water quality, promote information and education programs, and vigilantly monitor the forest health for all residents of Bertie County.

## **APPOINTMENTS AND REPORTS**

1. **OATH OF OFFICE FOR CLERK TO THE BOARD JOLEATHA CHESTNUTT ADMINISTERED BY HONORABLE ANNIE WILSON, BERTIE COUNTY REGISTER OF DEEDS**

The Honorable Annie Wilson administered the Oath of Office to Clerk to the Board Joleatha Chestnutt.

2. **INTRODUCTION OF EMERGENCY SERVICES DIRECTOR JOHN RAWLS**

County Manager Vaughan introduced Emergency Service Director John Rawls to the Board of Commissioners.

**3. 2024 GENERAL ELECTION UPDATE BY DIRECTOR OF ELECTIONS, LATOYA PEELE**

Board of Elections Director LaToya Peele reported the Bertie County Board of Elections will conduct the 2024 General Election on Tuesday, November 5, 2024.

Polls will open from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30- p.m. on Election Day. The polling places are located at:

- Colerain 1 Precinct – Colerain Municipal Building
- Colerain 2 Precinct – Powellsville Town Hall
- Indian Woods Precinct – Indian Woods Missionary Baptist Church
- Mitchells 1 Precinct – Hexlena Community Building
- Mitchells 2 Precinct – Aulander Community Building
- Merry Hill Precinct – Merry hill – Midway Fire Department
- Roxobel Precinct – Kelford Fire Department
- Snakebite Precinct – Mt. Ararat Baptist Church
- Windsor 1 Precinct – Windsor Community Building
- Windsor 2 Precinct – Askewville Fire Department
- Woodville Precinct – Lewiston Woodville Fire Department
- Whites Precinct – Perrytown Fire department

Early Voting will be held at the following locations from Thursday October 17, 2024 to Saturday, November 2, 2024:

<b>Bertie County Board of Elections Office</b> 210 W. Watson Street Windsor, NC 27983	Thursday, October 17 <sup>th</sup> – Friday, October 18 <sup>th</sup>	8:00 am – 7:30 pm
	Saturday, October 19 <sup>th</sup>	8:00 am – 7:30 pm
<b>Lewiston Fire Department</b> 103 W. Church Street Lewiston Woodville, NC 27849	Monday, October 21 <sup>st</sup> – Friday, October 25 <sup>th</sup>	8:00 am – 7:30 pm
	Saturday, October 26 <sup>th</sup>	8:00 am – 3:00 pm
<b>Powellsville Town Hall</b> 106 E. Main Street Powellsville, NC 27967	Monday, October 28 <sup>th</sup> – Friday, November 1 <sup>st</sup>	8:00 am – 3:00 pm

**Absentee ballots will be mailed to voters who have requested them beginning September 6, 2024.** A voter can fill out an absentee ballot request at [votebymail.ncsbe.gov](http://votebymail.ncsbe.gov), or by filling out a request form provided by the county board of elections office. The request must be received through the website or by the **Bertie** Board of Elections by 5:00 p.m. October 29, 2024.

In the General Election, all Candidates and Political Parties are on the ballot. Voters may cross vote meaning voters may vote for the Candidates of their choice even if they are of a different party.

Contests on the ballot include **Presidential Preference, U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives N.C. House, N.C. Senate, State Local Judges, County Commissioners, Board of Education and Soil and Water Conservation District.**

Voters voting in person are entitled to assistance by an election official, or if assistance is needed due to disability or illiteracy, by a qualified person of their choice. Registration facilities and voting sites are accessible to all voters. Curbside voting is available for voters who are not physically able to enter voting sites.

### **General Election**

- Voters must State their Name, Address and present an Acceptable Photo ID
- County Wide Election
  - All voters have the same ballot style
- All Candidates and Political Parties are on the ballot
  - The ballot is back and front
- Voters may cross vote
  - Vote for a candidate of a different party than which you are registered

### **End of Early Voting**

Once Early Voting ends at 3:00 pm on Saturday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, same day registration ends. Citizens who did not vote during Early Voting will have to vote at their assigned precinct on Election Day. Your precinct is determined by your physical address. You are to contact the Board of Elections office if you are unsure of your precinct. Once early Voting ends at 3:00 pm on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, all elections Offices will be unable to provide Voter Photo IDs. The blackout period is from Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup> – Nov. 5<sup>th</sup>. Free Photo IDs will still be available at the NCDMV.

### **Chairman Freeman Board of Elections**

Board of Elections Chairman Michael Freeman reported that Robert F. Kennedy will be removed from the ballot and 2.9 million ballots were already printed including his name.

Board of Elections Chairman Freeman discussed the importance of educating voters. The most significant gap is helping voters learn who is on the ballot in a Non-Partisan way. There are transportation challenges for voters.

Board of Elections Chairman Freeman reported since the last Presidential Election there have been major changes. Elections are one of the most important things that a citizen will ever do if they are a registered voter. Community leaders have to educate the voters because people listen to who they can trust.

Commissioner Roberson thanked Board of Elections Chairman Freeman and Board of Election Director Latoya Peele for their informative reports.

## CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve Register of Deeds Fees Report – August 2024

Commissioner Roberson made the **MOTION** to approve the Register of Deeds Fees Report-August 2024. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Ballance. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **3-0** vote.

2. Approve Resolution for Approving Local Water Supply Plan for Bertie County Regional Water System

Commissioner Ballance made the **MOTION** to approve Resolution for Approving Local Water Supply Plan for Bertie County Regional Water System. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **3-0** vote.

## \*\*\*OTHER ITEMS\*\*\* DISCUSSION AGENDA (D)

1. Proposed 2025 Holiday Schedule and 2025 Bertie County Board of Commissioners Meeting Schedule

County Manager Vaughan asked the Board of Commissioners to review the 2025 Holiday Schedule and 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting Schedule. No approval is requested tonight; hopefully both schedules will be approved at the October 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.

2. Discuss Plans for 2024 Employee Appreciation Luncheon

County Manger Vaughan reported that the Christmas Parade will take place on the 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday in December, which is December 5<sup>th</sup>. The County offices close at noon for the Employee Appreciation Luncheon. Since the venue used last year is not an option, we are considering other locations. We are considering spaces at Bertie High School as well as Blue Jay Recreation Center. We will celebrate our employees and present them with their Service Awards.

3. Next Board of Commissioners Meeting: 9/23/24, 10:00 AM Work Session, Community Meeting Room

The County Manager mentioned the next Board of Commissioners Meeting will be Wednesday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> at 10:00 am. This will be a Work Session in the Community Room at the Cooperative Extension Building.

## **COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS**

### **Commissioner Roberson**

Commissioner Roberson asked that Ms. Morris from Martin Community College and Mr. Matthews from Roanoke-Chowan Community College introduce themselves.

### **Commissioner Ballance**

Commissioner Ballance had no report.

### **Commissioner Trent**

Commissioner Trent reported that the Albemarle Food Bank is distributing a great amount of food for over 700 families in Bertie County. If anyone is interested in volunteering, please contact Debbie Freeman.

## **COUNTY MANAGER REPORT**

County Manager Vaughan had no report.

## **ATTORNEY REPORT**

Assistant County Attorney Huddleston had no report.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no public comments.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Roberson made the **MOTION** to adjourn the meeting. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Ballance. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **3-0** vote.



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Chair John Trent  
Bertie County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

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Juan Vaughan, II, County Manager