Bertie County, North Carolina March 17, 2025 COMMISSIONERS' WORK SESSION

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners met for a work session today at 10:00AM inside the Community Meeting Room, 104 Lancaster Avenue, Windsor, NC. The following members were present or absent:

Present: Chair, Corey Ballance, Sr., District III

Vice-Chair, Lewis Hoggard, III, District I

Ronald "Ron" Roberson, District V

Vivian Saunders, District IV Michael White, District II

Staff Present: County Manager, Juan Vaughan, II

Assistant County Manager, David Scarborough

County Attorney, Jonathan Huddleston

Clerk to the Board, Tonya Davis

Information Technology Director, Joseph Wilkes

Network Administrator, Dashawn Clark

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Ballance called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

Public Comments

No comments

Commissioners Orientation by County Manager, Juan Vaughan, II

County Manager Vaughan thanked everyone for attending and emphasizes the importance of the Commissioner's orientation. The orientation is divided into three parts: roles and responsibilities of County Commissioners, presentations from department heads, and an overview of important documents in the Commissioners' binders. County Manager Vaughan explained the significance of understanding department services for making informed decisions, especially during budget work sessions. The orientation aims to provide Commissioners with a comprehensive understanding of their roles and the County's operations.

County Manager Vaughan outlined the roles and responsibilities of the Board Chair, Commissioners, and County Manager according to North Carolina General Statutes. The Board Chair serves as the presiding officer, conducts meetings, and can call special meetings or declare a state of emergency.

Commissioners are policy makers with the authority to create, change, abolish, or consolidate

county government, and approve policies that the County Manager executes.

The County Manager has hiring and firing authority and executes policies, orders, ordinances, resolutions, and regulations approved by the Board. The County Manager prepares and submits the annual budget and capital programs, and provides the Board with reports on the County's finances and administrative activities. The County Manager also makes recommendations to the Board.

Commissioner Saunders asked about repercussions for Commissioners negotiating contracts or interacting with department heads outside their scope. County Manager Vaughan explained that such actions can create confusion and are generally unethical, but do not necessarily violate the law. The focus should be on staying within the Board's authority and avoiding unlawful decisions.

Presentations from Department Heads

Tax Administrator, Jodie Rhea, outlined the mission of the tax office, which includes administering tax laws and maintaining public confidence. The tax office is responsible for listing, appraising, assessing real and personal property, and collecting taxes. The office also maintains land records, tax maps, and geographic information systems data. Current projects include a software upgrade and preparations for the 2028 countywide reappraisal.

Veteran's Services, Denise Clark (absent), David Scarborough presented in Ms. Clark's absence. Mr. Scarborough stated that the Veteran's Services Department helps over 1,100 veterans annually with information on their rights and entitlements under the law. Ms. Clark maintains partnerships with other agencies and attends conferences to stay updated on benefits changes and laws.

Recreation Department, Donna Mizelle, outlined the department's mission to provide recreational activities for all citizens of Bertie County. Current activities include spring and fall soccer, tackle football, and an adult softball league. The department also partners with the state parks for kayak lessons and maintains various properties, including a 147-acre riverfront property and a 14-acre complex. Future goals include building an indoor facility and increasing staff to expand activities.

Elections, LaToya Peel, explained the mission of the Elections Department to educate voters and administer secure, accurate, and accessible elections. The department receives and processes voter registration forms, files candidates for office, and aids in assistance with absentee voting and early voting. Current projects include planning for the 2025 municipal election and increasing voter turnout by eliminating false narratives. LaToya Peele is also involved in state-level activities, including serving as an officer for the North Carolina Association of Directors of Elections.

Emergency Services, John Rawls, outlined the mission of the Emergency Services Department to provide high levels of care and compassion in emergencies. The department includes emergency management, fire marshal, EMS, 911 response, and non-emergency transport. Last year, the department responded to approximately 4,500 calls, with an average of 12 calls per day. Current projects include updating disaster plans, mutual aid agreements, and constructing a new EMS station in Mary Hill.

Commissioner Saunders inquired about the numbers and equipment needed for a water rescue

Mr. Rawls explained that the department is investigating the costs and training required for a water rescue team. The department has some limited resources, including boats and equipment from the sheriff's department, and is exploring the possibility of a regional water rescue team.

Commissioner Saunders asked Mr. Rawls about putting a water safety training together along with the Recreation Department for youth and adults. Mr. Rawls stated that is a great idea and he would try to make that happen.

Planning and Inspections, Traci White (absent), David Scarborough presented in Mrs. White's absence. Mr. Scarborough explained the mission of the Planning & Inspections Department to safeguard the public, promote the health, safety, and welfare of our citizens through enforcement of the North Carolina Building Codes and encourage good development through local plans and ordinances. The Planning & Inspections Department helps assist citizens with plans for building and developing including: permitting, enforcement of state building codes, new construction, residential and commercial development, subdivisions, flood damage prevention, and nuisance abatement. Current projects include hiring/training/retention of new Building Inspectors, BRIC Grant, grant funding for home elevations, Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance update, upgrade/enhancement of permitting software, possible update of Subdivision Ordinance, and possible development of County Zoning.

Council on Aging, Rebecca Stapleton, outlined the mission for the Bertie County Council on Aging – Senior Center as committed to serve the older adult population and their caregivers by providing resources, activities, and advocacy aimed at enhancing their quality of life. Services provided by the Council of Aging are congregate and home delivered meals, in-home aide services, housing and home improvement (ramps), medical and general transportation, incontinent supplies, liquid nutrition, day trips & activities, exercise room and classes, educational and craft classes, dances, special events (Prom, Christmas Party, etc.), Medicare information and assistance, community resource presentations and information, volunteer opportunities, support groups, health screenings, advocacy and much more. Current projects are as follows: MySeniorCenter Software upgrade and the major goal of the COA is to become a certified Senior Center of Excellence through the NC Division of Aging and Human Services. The COA will apply this Fiscal Year to become certified for next Fiscal Year.

911 Communications, JW Hoggard, provided the mission, vision and values as to serve and protect the citizens and first responders of Bertie County with dignity and respect as if they are family. The overview of the department is to provide emergency and non-emergency assistance from Law Enforcement, Fire, EMS and Animal Control. 911 Communication goals are to move forward with our facility construction, the installation of equipment that is much needed, and training our employees while continuing to provide citizens with top-notch service. The current project is the construction of a new 911 Communications Center on County Farm Road.

Human Resources, Nicole Boone, explained that the mission of the Human Resources Department is through the acquisition, retention, and support of high-quality staff. Through interaction, observation, support and training, this department is committed to the overall safety and outstanding performance of all employees in their service to the citizens of Bertie County. Human Resources provides recruitment and selection, benefits administration, risk management (safety and incidental claims processing), employee relations, training and development, maintenance of personnel records, and department head support.

Water Department, Ricky Spivey, the Water Departments mission is to provide the highest quality of drinking water services to its customers at the lowest possible cost while protecting the

environment and maintaining its assets for a sustainable future. The system is broken into 4 separate water districts that interconnect to provide potable water to the entire county. Mr. Spivey stated that there are 546 miles of water lines ranging in size from 3/4" to 16" water main, 9 elevated water storage tanks ranging in size from 75,000 gallons to 500,000 gallons. The accumulative total of all 9 tanks is 3,575,000 gallons. The system has just over a 3-day supply, at approximately 800,00 gallons per day (Minimum state standard 1/2 day). The most current major project is that on August 24, 2022, we received the Letter of Intent to Fund Bertie County Water District IV Lewiston Woodville Community Water System Replacement, in the amount of \$4,912,611.00. The Water Departments goals are to increase the benefits of the water system while reducing the risks in the water system and to improve operational efficiency and safety of the water system

Maintenance Department, Anthony Rascoe, stated that the mission of the maintenance Department is to provide timely maintenance service to all Bertie County Buildings & Grounds and to ensure the staff and public are in a clean, safe and comfortable environment that will enhance staff job performance which will result in improved public service. Current projects are to collaborate with 9-1-1 Communications in the construction of new Communications facility.

The Water Department's goals are to increase training opportunities for staff in electrical, HVAC and plumbing services.

NC Cooperative Extension, Billy Barrow (absent), Cindy Davis presented in Mr. Barrow's absence. NC Cooperative Extension extends research-based knowledge to all North Carolinians, helping them transform science into everyday solutions that improve their lives and grow our state. Their goals are to build confidence, character and careers for youth, increase digital opportunity awareness and skills for all citizens, decrease chronic disease through diet and physical activity, and to increase profitability and sustainability of growers in Bertie County. The Cooperative Extensions major projects are to enrolling youth in programs with STEM, robotics, public speaking and physical activity, train citizens on digital equity, devices and opportunities, participating in multistate programs focused on diabetes and high obesity, leading multi-county corn variety evaluations, participate in state wide official variety soybean and corn trials, and to lead multi-county field trials for all major commodities in Bertie with leading research projects.

Department of Social Services, Daphine Little, the mission of Bertie County Department of Social Services (BCDSS) is to enhance the quality of life for children, families and adults, promoting well-being and self-sufficiency. The Department of Social Services strives to protect children, the elderly, and provide public assistance to the citizens of Bertie County by leading a fiscally accountable multi-program human services organization mandated by Federal and State Law that is locally administered. Goals of DSS is to locate and provide community resources to the citizens of Bertie County eligible for agency assistance, continue community outreach on behalf of children, families, and adults that we serve at DSS, continue to improve in Children Services and Adult Services, improve in all Federal and State Reviews and to meet DSS Strategic Plan Objectives

Sheriff's Department, Tyrone Ruffin, the Sheriff's Department's mission is to protect and serve the lives and properties of all citizens of Bertie County and anyone who passes through, in a lawful, fair, impartial, and non-discriminating manner. To provide leadership and professional support as required by law to ensure that the laws of this land are carried out in a manner that respects individuals' rights and freedoms. To work cooperatively with all law enforcement agencies to ensure that all citizens and anyone who passes through are receiving the full range of law enforcement services required for a safe and orderly society. The current major projects are to

revitalize the firing range off County Farm Road and be more effective with evidence management. The top priorities are to have a stronger field training program and to train current and future staff to become more efficient and effective in discharging our duties.

Information Technology, Joe Wilkes, explained that the Information Technology Department's mission is to promote and support the effective use of technology solutions and to recommend, implement, secure and maintain innovative and reliable technology to further the goals of the County in the most cost-effective way. Major projects are to complete network backbone switch upgrade and the Server Virtualization project. The goals of the department are to redesign and upgrade the County website, be more interactive with citizens, ability for citizens to create their own account – opt for SMS or Email notifications, be able to allow County Departments to manage their webpages, streamline County internal workorder system for efficiency, and to find new ways to harness technology to enhance our county for both employees and citizens of Bertie County

Soil and Water Conservation, Vic Thompson (absent), David Scarborough presented in Mr. Thompsons' absence. The mission of the Soil and Water Conservation Department is to foster voluntary, incentive- driven management of soil, water, and related natural resources for the benefit of the environment, economy and all citizens. The department administers cost share programs funded by the North Carolina Division of Soil and Water, assists Natural Resources Conservation Service in implementing conservation programs, assesses damage after a natural disaster, administers emergency funds that come available from the state and federal government and oversees repairs.

Register of Deeds, Annie Wilson, the mission of the Register of Deeds is to provide an easily accessible, accurate and timely archival database of the county records while providing prompt, courteous and efficient customer service. The office is governed by Chapter 161 of the NCGS and serves as a Custodian and Manager for many public records such as: maintain Notary Public Records, grave removals, issue birth, death, and marriage certificates and licenses. The most recent project was the NC Vital Records System called NCDAVE. This system allows the department to issue death certificates that occurred in any other county of NC Starting October 2022. The goals are to implement a Fraud Detection Alert System. This will allow systems to know if something has been recorded in their name against their property they have on file.

Finance Department, Willie Mack Carawan, the Finance Department's mission is to provide timely, accurate and complete fiscal records of the County and its departments in accordance with North Carolina General Statutes, rules of the Local Government Commission and generally accepted principles of governmental accounting. The main goal is to maintain the finances for the county. We make sure employees and vendors are paid in a timely manner.

Assistant County Manager, David Scarborough, provided the 2025 Commissioner Orientation Manuals to the Board and gave an overview of the documents listed inside the binders.

Appointments

Tourism Development Authority (TDA)

The TDA has eight open appointments, 3 Tourism, 3 Lodging, 1 member from the Chamber of Commerce, and 1 Ex-Officio County Finance Director. The candidates were as follows: (Tourism) Bri Godwin, Tim Bazemore, Laura Orsini, and Patricia Ferguson. (Lodging) Kelsey Reside, Allen Castelloe, Jeffery Johnson, and Brenda Cooper.

Each Board Member voted individually for each group.

Tourism

Commissioner Roberson voted Tim Bazemore, Laura Orsini, Patricia Ferguson Vice-Chair Hoggard voted Bri Godwin, Tim Bazemore, Patricia Ferguson Chairman Ballance voted Bri Godwin, Tim Bazemore, Patricia Ferguson Commissioner White voted Tim Bazemore, Laura Orsini, Patricia Ferguson Commissioner Saunders recused herself from voting due to her being a nominee to represent the Chamber of Commerce.

Since there was a tie in votes between Laura Orsini and Bri Godwin, the Board re-voted.

Commissioner Roberson voted for Laura Orsini

Commissioner Hoggard voted for Bri Godwin

Chairman Ballance voted for Laura Orsini

Commissioner White voted Laura Orsini

Commissioner Saunders recused herself from voting due to her being a nominee to represent the Chamber of Commerce.

Lodging

Chairman Ballance voted Allen Castelloe, Jeffery Johnson, Brenda Cooper Commissioner Roberson voted Allen Castelloe, Jeffery Johnson, Brenda Cooper Vice-Chair Hoggard voted Kelsey Reside, Allen Castelloe, Brenda Cooper Commissioner White voted Kelsey Reside, Allen Castelloe, Brenda Cooper Commissioner Saunders recused herself from voting due to her being a nominee to represent the Chamber of Commerce.

Since there was a tie in votes between Jeffery Johnson and Kelsey Reside, the Board re-voted. Chairman Ballance voted Jeffery Johnson Commissioner Roberson voted Jeffery Johnson Vice-Chair Hoggard voted Kelsey Reside Commissioner White voted Kelsey Reside

Due to there being another tie in votes, Chairman Ballance changed his vote to elect Kelsey Reside.

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to appoint Tim Bazemore, Laura Orsini, Patricia Ferguson, Kelsey Reside, Allen Castelloe, Brenda Cooper, Vivian Saunders, and Willie Mac Carawan to the Tourism Development Authority. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **4-0** vote.

Bertie Martin Regional Jail Board

There were three applications received for the Martin Regional Jail Board: Tyrone Ruffin, Charles Smith, and William David Ray. Commissioner Saunders is the Chair for the Bertie Martin Regional Jail Board and recommended Tyrone Ruffin and William Davis Ray. Commissioner Saunders recused herself from voting since she is on the Jail Board.

Commissioner Roberson voted Tyron Ruffin and William David Ray Vice-Chair Hoggard voted Tyron Ruffin and William David Ray Chairman Ballance voted Tyron Ruffin and William David Ray Commissioner White voted Tyron Ruffin and William David Ray

Commissioner Roberson made a **MOTION** to appoint Tyron Ruffin and William David Ray to the Bertie Martin Regional Jail Board. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner White. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **4-0** vote.

Choanoke Public Transportation Authority (CPTA)

Commissioner Saunders made a MOTION to re-appoint Vice-Chair Lewis Hoggard, III, to the Choanoke Public Transportation Authority. The MOTION was SECONDED by Commissioner Roberson. The MOTION PASSED with a 5-0 vote.

Albemarle Regional Library

Vice-Chair Hoggard made a MOTION to re-appoint Irene Walker to the Albemarle Regional Library. The MOTION was SECONDED by Commissioner Saunders. The MOTION PASSED with a 5-0 vote.

Tri-County Airport Board

Chairman Ballance resigned from the Tri-County Airport Board.

Commissioner Roberson made a **MOTION** to appoint Vice-Chair Hoggard to the Tri-County Airport Board. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

Consent Agenda

Tax Release Journals (January and February 2025)

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to approve the January and February 2025 Tax release Journals. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

Register of Deeds Fees Report for January and February 2025

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to approve the January and February 2025 Register of Deeds Fees Reports. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

Contract for Aging Services from the North Carolina Division of Aging

Vice-Chair Hoggard made a **MOTION** to approve the Contract for Aging Services from the North Carolina Division of Aging. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

Schedule dates for Convening of the Board of Equalization & Review

Tax Administrator, Jodie Rhea, informed the Board that the Bertie County Board of Commissioners are the Board of Equalization & Review. The purpose of the Board is to provide tax payers the opportunity for a hearing and review of the assessment of their property. During any year of the Reappraisal cycle a tax payer may appeal the appraised value of their property. The first step is usually an informal process through the Tax Administrator seeking to resolve any differences between the County's values and what the tax payer believes them to be before filling a formal appeal. This process usually takes place between January and March. The Board must

convene no earlier than the first Monday in April and no later than the first Monday in May. The Board of E&R shall complete its duties on or before the third Monday following its first meeting. The statutes are vague and does not state how many meetings must be conducted. The School of Government has interpreted that the statute, in light of its vague language, to mean that the Board must have at least two meetings, but it is ultimately the Board's decision. Mr. Rhea stated that he is here today to see how many meetings the Board would like to have and when.

The Commissioners held a discussion on when to have these meetings. Vice-Chair Hoggard suggested to have a Board of Equalization & Review meeting on April 7, 2025 during the regular Commissioners meeting and to schedule a Work Session for April 21, 2025 at 10:00AM.

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to have a Work Session on April 21, 2025 at 10:00AM in the Commissioners Meeting Room. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 5-0 vote.

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to have a Board of Equalization & Review meeting on April 7, 2025 at 6:00PM and on April 21, 2025 at 10:00AM in the Commissioners Meeting Room. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 5-0 vote.

County Manager Vaughan informed the Board that Jeffery Johnson has submitted an offer to purchase the old Good Shepherd Food Pantry property for \$75,000. Assistant County Attorney, Jonathan Huddleston, stated that if the County accepts the offer, Mr. Johnson has to pay a 5% deposit of the offer and a Notice of Negotiated Offer has to be advertised in the newspaper for ten days to see if there are upset bids. If there are no upset bids within ten days the Board may sale the property to Mr. Johnson.

The Board held a discussion concerning the property.

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to accept the offer from Jeffery Johnson to purchase the old Good Shepherd Food Pantry property for \$75,000 and to place the Notice of Negotiated Offer in the newspaper for 10 days. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 3-2 vote. Vice-Chair Hoggard and Commissioner Saunders voted nay.

Consideration of Request to Install a Fire Hydrant at Fire Station in Hexalena Chair Ballance stated that the Board has received different cost of the installation and would need a more accurate cost before deciding.

Commissioner Roberson requested to table the Request to Install a Fire Hydrant at Fire Station in Hexalena until County Manager Vaughan could provide more accurate information on the cost.

Discussion of Request for Council on Aging Expansion

Rebecca Stapleton stated that the Recreation Department is using three or four rooms at the Council on Aging Building for storage and intakes. These rooms could be utilized by the Council on Aging for services that they provide. Mrs. Stapleton asked the Board to consider finding another location for the Recreation Department's supplies and where the Recreation Department can do intakes.

Commissioner Saunders asked County Manager Vaughan what other available spaces could the Recreation Department use. County Manager Vaughan stated that County owned space that is available is the house on King Street or the old Southwestern School. County Manager Vaughan stated that he could take a look at the conditions and availability of the Southwestern School. An assessment would need to be done to see how much it would cost to get the space usable.

Consideration of Camper Donations to Seaboard Lion's Club for Avery County Assistant County Manager David Scarborough, informed the Board that the County still owns two campers that were donated to the County after the Morning Road tornado. Mr. Scarborough asked the Board to consider transferring ownership of the two campers to the Seaboard Lion's Club so that they can repair the campers and take them to Avery County where we have previously transferred ownership of four campers after Hurricane Helene. They have estimated the costs of repairing the campers to be approximately \$4,000 apiece.

The board held a discussion and asked County Manager Vaughan to contact Avery County to see if they are interested in getting the campers directly from Bertie County and Avery County could then get the Seaboard Lion's Club to pick them up, repair them, and then deliver them to Avery County.

Commissioner Roberson asked Mr. Scarborough to provide the Board with a list of all of the County's assets (Real and Personal Property).

Discussion of Basketball Court Construction

County Manager Vaughan stated that they had received bids for the construction but at that time there was not enough money for the project. However, since that time, the Board has had discussions about using some of the funds from the Animal Shelter. Previously, the Board had instructed Mr. Scarborough to contact the State Inspector for the Animal Shelter to see what needs to be done to get the shelter up to date and those funds will possibility be needed to update the Animal Shelter. Mr. Scarborough stated that he had received an update from the Inspector and gave the Board a brief description of the needs required to be compliant.

The Board stated that some of the projects are taking too long to be completed and need to be completed as soon as possible. County Manager Vaughan stated that we need money to complete the projects.

Commissioner White asked Mr. Scarborough to identify the source of the funds for the Animal Shelter. Mr. Scarborough stated that \$200,000 came from the Office of Management and Budget and \$300,000 are from ARPA funds. Some of the funds were used for Engineering and Architectural Designs.

Chair Ballance asked what the minimum bid on the basketball Court was. Mr. Scarborough stated it was \$83,000. Chair Ballance asked how much have we spent out of the budget for the Animal Shelter. Mr. Scarborough said that \$85,000 has been spent out of the budget. Chair Ballance asked which category did the \$85,000 for Animal Shelter funds come from. Mr. Scarborough stated that the initials funds came from the Office of Management and Budget (\$200,000). Chair Balance asked how much was the low bid for the Basketball Court with a composite floor. Mr. Scarborough stated that the low bid was roughly \$130,000.

Chair Ballance instructed Mr. Scarborough to contact the low bidder to see if the bid is still valid and how much it would be to include the composite flooring.

Consideration of Ownership of Aulander Elementary School Property

The Board held a discussion concerning the options of Aulander Elementary School Property.

Commissioner Saunders made a **MOTION** for the County to take ownership of the Aulander Elementary School Property from the Bertie County Board of Education. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The MOTION PASSED with a 5-0 vote.

No public comments.

CLOSED SESSION

Commissioner White made a **MOTION** to go into Closed Session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3)(4)(6). The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The Board unanimously moved to enter closed session.

Commissioner Roberson made a MOTION to re-enter into Open Session. The MOTION was SECONDED by Commissioner Saunders. The Board unanimously moved to re-enter into Open Session.

Commissioner Saunders stated that Davis Ball Park needed bleachers and asked the Board to lend the bleachers at the old Southwestern School to be used at Davis Ball Park. The Board consulted with the Attorney.

Commissioner Saunders made a **MOTION** to lend the bleachers at the old Southwestern School to be used at Davis Ball Park. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The MOTION PASSED with a 5-0 vote.

There were no further comments from the Board.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Saunders made the MOTION to adjourn the work session. The MOTION was SECONDED by Commissioner Roberson. The MOTION PASSED with a 5-0 vote.

Bertie County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Tonya R. Davis Clerk to the Board