

Windsor, North Carolina
March 2, 2015
Regular Meeting

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners met for their regularly scheduled meeting at 4:00pm in the Commissioners Room located at 106 Dundee Street Windsor, NC. The following members were present or absent:

Present: Ronald "Ron" Wesson, District I
Stewart White, District II
Tammy A. Lee, District III
John Trent, District IV
Ernestine (Byrd) Bazemore, District V

Absent: None

Staff Present: County Manager Scott Sauer
Clerk to the Board Sarah S. Tinkham
County Attorney Lloyd Smith
Network Administrator Joe Wilkes
Finance Director William Roberson
Economic Development Director Steve Biggs
Tax Administrator Jodie Rhea
Emergency Services Director Mitch Cooper

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

INVOCATION

Chairman Wesson led the Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Wesson requested time to provide a brief statement.

Chairman Wesson recognize staff efforts during the recent inclement weather events.

Even though the Courthouse and various facilities had to close, all of the essential staff continued to perform with professionalism and without missing a beat.

The Sheriff's patrol was extremely busy given the conditions of roads in Bertie County.

EMS kept rolling and responding to all medical emergencies, and Emergency Services Director, Mitch Cooper, has become very proficient with the handling and towing of disabled emergency vehicles

The Maintenance Department was working to insure the sidewalks, entrances, and parking lots to County facilities were cleared and safe for use.

Maintenance Director, Anthony Rascoe, inspected various buildings to insure that the heat was working, and that there were no frozen pipes.

The Water Department was also kept busy with the monitoring wells, tanks, and pump stations on a daily basis.

On the evening of Wednesday, February 25, Mr. Spivey and his office manager, Connie Coburn, met with the Mayor and Commissioners in the Town of Roxobel regarding the next steps in acquiring and operating the Town's water system.

Additionally, County Finance and Human Resources staff were in the offices despite the closure to make sure that vendors were paid in a timely manner for checks to be cut as usual on the 25th, and to insure that all employees' payroll direct deposits occurred by Friday, February 28.

Both Sheriff John Holley and Mr. Cooper expressed gratitude for the Board's support in funding 4 wheel drive vehicles in the FY 2014-2015 budget.

In previous years, as a response to winter weather, Sheriff Holley was forced to scramble and find any vehicle with 4 wheel drive which included borrowing Nuisance Abatement Officer, Barry Anderson's, old animal control vehicle.

Sheriff Holley reported that his department was much more prepared to respond to this year's winter weather all thanks to the Board of Commissioners.

Likewise, Mr. Cooper indicated that he finally has a truck with the appropriate pulling capacity, so that when an ambulance gets stuck in snow or ice, he is able to remedy the situation without "tearing the [vehicle] all to pieces."

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Terry Pratt of Merry Hill informed the Board of a public hearing that will take place at 6:00pm on Thursday, March 26, over at the Bertie County Courthouse. The public hearing is being hosted by the Utilities Commission regarding various solar farm projects.

Greg Hughes approached the Board with a concern regarding his experience with the County's new business personal property auditor, County Tax Services, Inc.

Mr. Hughes expressed that he felt he was potentially being overtaxed, and that the County was "double dipping" regarding the taxes of various buildings and equipment for the upkeep of his chicken houses.

Chairman Wesson stated that he was glad Mr. Hughes brought his concerns forward, and that a detailed report was to be presented by representatives from County Tax Services, Inc. later in the meeting.

Mr. Wesson encouraged Mr. Hughes to stay until that portion of the meeting and that all of his questions will be answered as thoroughly as possible at that time.

There were no other Public Comments.

APPOINTMENTS

MUST-Innov8, Inc. project proposal by Joe Kronner and Sam McCormick

Joe Kronner and Sam McComick of MUST-Innov8, Inc. showed a Power Point presentation detailing various robotics events that they have coordinated, specifically in Forsyth County, NC.

The “Robot Run” is a chance for students with an interest in STEM areas (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) to test their abilities at successfully building, and programming a robot to complete an obstacle course.

“Robot Run” also provides opportunities for the community to sponsor, volunteer, and mentor students in preparation for the event.

Mr. McCormick announced that in partnership with Bertie County Public Schools, and the Roanoke River Valley Education Consortium (RRVEC) STEM Education Initiative, a similar pilot program called the FIRST ® LEGO ® League.

The league will consist of middle school students between the ages of 9 and 14 that will span RRVEC’s 5 school systems including Bertie County.

An event has already been scheduled for Saturday, March 28th from 9:00AM-4:00PM.

Flyers were also provided to the County Manager for distribution.

**Heritage Collegiate Leadership Academy (HCLA) update by Executive Director,
Kashi B. Hall**

Ms. Kashi Hall reported that the Heritage Collegiate Leadership Academy is providing another public school option for the County, and is also serving Chowan, Hertford, Martin, and Washington Counties.

Currently, 196 students are enrolled in kindergarten through third grade.

Next year, Ms. Hall reported that enrollment will exceed 300 students with the addition of fourth grade.

Ms. Hall announced that for the first time in North Carolina charter school history, HCLA received the biggest contribution of Title 1 & Title 2 grant funding.

That funding provided HCLA with the ability to start an after school, Sylvan program that provided transportation and afternoon snacks for participating students.

Ms. Hall also reported that HCLA has been visited 3 times recently by the Department of Public Instruction. She informed the Board that after the third visit, Ms. Hall was notified that representatives from the Department would not need to return to HCLA until the end of the school year due to the many positive qualities they have seen throughout their recent visits.

Additionally, Ms. Hall announced that HCLA was currently exploring summer clinic opportunities for students and the community such as golf, dance, and debate for elementary and middle school grades, as well various other workshops for high school grades.

Lastly, Ms. Hall requested the Board's continued support, and encouraged the Board to take the time to visit the HCLA campus for a tour, as well as to consider alerting her to any new grant opportunities that HCLA could explore.

The Board commended Ms. Hall for a great opening year, and congratulated her on the success.

Chairman Wesson thanked Ms. Hall for her update and provided two possible grant sources including the Bertie-Hertford Community Foundation as well as the Transformation Zone.

**Status report on the verification process for business personal property taxes by Tax
Administrator, Jodie Rhea, and Johnny Bailey of County Tax Services, Inc.**

The Board heard a report from Tax Administrator, Jodie Rhea, regarding his department's efforts to work with all business owners in Bertie County to verify that equipment and business personal property is appropriately listed for taxes and depreciation purposes.

Mr. Rhea reported that over 900 businesses are listed with the Bertie County Tax Office, and since the contract with CTS, Inc. was approved in June 2014, 104 businesses have participated in the business personal property review and verification process.

Mr. Johnny Bailey of CTS reported to the Board that “this engagement is really an informational process for the taxpayers and assists them with achieving compliance with the North Carolina tax laws.”

Once a business taxpayer’s listing has been reviewed, the taxpayer is notified in writing of the new value or discover, and the taxpayer has thirty days to appeal the new value before a revised tax bill.

In Bertie County, the potential discovered value is estimated at \$92,000,000. Nearly two thirds of this amount is still being reviewed or under appeal.

Chairman Wesson noted, that when looking at the individual tax burden for our senior citizens, working single parents, farmers and businesses across the County, it is very important that everyone is treated fairly and equitably.

If one taxpayer has a 22 foot fishing boat and doesn’t list it for taxes, it is not fair to his neighbor that has properly listed his pontoon boat.

Business personal property includes equipment that you might find at the local dry cleaner, cooking equipment in a restaurant, spare parts, fuel and farm equipment used to raise cotton or sage—all of which is required by law to be listed for property taxes each year in all 100 counties in North Carolina.

Mr. Rhea reminded the Board, that this is not a new law or new tax. “This work by CTS is the best way to insure fairness and equity among taxpayers” he said.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Nursing Home/Adult Care Advisory Committee

The Board announced that at its previous meeting on Thursday, February 19, that Mr. James Pugh was recommended to serve on the Nursing Home/Adult Care Advisory Committee.

Chairman Wesson announced that an application had been received from Mr. Pugh for consideration.

Commissioner Trent made a **MOTION** to appoint James Pugh to the Nursing Home/Adult Care Advisory Committee. Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

Approve minutes for Closed Session 2-2-15

County Manager Sauer recommended this item for approval.

Commissioner Bazemore made a **MOTION** to approve the minutes for Closed Session 2-2-15. Commissioner Lee **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Approve minutes for Planning Sessions 2-9-15 and 2-10-15

County Manager Sauer recommended this item for approval.

Vice Chairman Lee made a **MOTION** to approve the minutes for Planning Sessions 2-9-15 and 2-10-15. Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Approve minutes for Regular Session 2-19-15

Tax Administrator, Jodie Rhea, requested permission to advertise the total unpaid 2014-2015 real property tax liens as required by N.C.G.S. 105-369(a)

Commissioner Bazemore made a **MOTION** to approve the minutes for Regular Session 2-19-15. Commissioner White **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Tax Department Error Ledger – January 2015

County Manager Sauer recommended this item for approval.

Commissioner Bazemore made a **MOTION** to accept the Tax Department Error Ledger for January 2015. Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

DISCUSSION AGENDA

Review and consideration of convenience center proposals and contract development

There was no further discussion needed on this topic.

Chairman Wesson announced to the public that the Board had met in Open Session with both vendors prior to this meeting and that all of their questions had been answered regarding each proposal.

Commissioner Trent made a **MOTION** to enter into negotiations with Republic Services, Inc. regarding operation of the County's 5 convenience sites. Commissioner White **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

The Board thanked the representatives present from Waste Industries for their partnership and assured them that this decision was purely to continue negotiations with Republic Services, Inc.

Review and consideration of Road Name Change Policy

After some discussion, Vice Chairman Lee made a **MOTION** that at least 75% of all property owners on a given road should approve the application for a road name change. Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

Additionally, Commissioner Trent made a **MOTION** to set a fee of \$250 for any name changes which would include the cost of advertising, as well as one complete set of signage (2 signs and mounting/placement materials) with any additional needed signage at an additional cost to the applicant(s). Commissioner Bazemore **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

County Attorney will coordinate with Clerk to the Board to set up two public hearings as required by North Carolina General Statute.

Discuss alternative date for ICS 402 class for Public Officials

Mr. Cooper informed the Board that the date of March 10th that the Board previously decided on was not conducive to the class instructor's schedule and provided a list of dates that would work with the instructor's schedule.

The Board concluded that Tuesday, April 7, 2015 from 9:00AM-1:00PM was the most convenient.

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Commissioner Bazemore informed all of those present about hers and the Chairman's attendance at the 2015 NACo Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. February 21-25 at the Marriot Wardman Park Hotel.

Commissioner Bazemore stated that the event was a great opportunity to speak with North Carolina's federal leaders, and allowed herself and the Chairman the time to meet personally with Congressman G.K. Butterfield regarding the issues that matter most in Bertie County.

Commissioner White requested that a report be given to the Board regarding NET, finances, and call volume at the next regular meeting on Monday, March 16, at 7:00pm in Askewville.

The Board came to a consensus to receive a preview of the report from 2:00PM-4:00PM on Tuesday, March 10, 2015 in the first floor Commissioners Room.

Chairman Wesson echoed the same sentiments as Commissioner Bazemore and added that Bertie County is being being considered as a featured County for rural infrastructure.

COUNTY MANAGER'S REPORTS

County Manager Sauer reminded the Board that proposals for the convenience centers are due to the County on February 3, 2015. The deadline was extended for all vendors.

Mr. Sauer also requested that the Board recess this meeting until Monday, February 9, 2015 at 7:30am. The Board will be meeting for their annual Planning Sessions at the Roanoke-Cashie River Center February 9-10, 2015.

COUNTY ATTORNEY'S REPORTS

The County Attorney gave no remarks at this time.

COUNTY MANAGER'S REPORTS

County Manager Sauer requested guidance in the appropriate steps to take as far as negotiations are concerned with Republic Services, Inc.

The Board decided that a meeting should be held with 2 Commissioners and representatives of Republic Services in the near future to being negotiations.

Additionally, County Manager Sauer reminded the Board of a contract made less than a year ago regarding mowing at the County's various water tank and pump sites.

Ray Jones was awarded the contract, but specific terms about the contract expiration had not yet been ironed out completely.

After some discussion, Commissioner Bazemore made a **MOTION** to provide a contract term of 5 years for mowing services provided by Ray Jones. Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** in a 3-2 result with Commissioner's Bazemore, Trent, and White voting in favor of the motion while Chairman Wesson and Vice Chairman Lee voting against the motion.

COUNTY ATTORNEY'S REPORTS

County Attorney Lloyd Smith requested that a new date be announced for the Board to meet with various experts regarding the latest matters with the new Bertie High School.

PUBLIC COMMENTS CONTINUED

Josephine Aiken of Republic Services, Inc. thanked the Board for the opportunity to work with the County further on contract negotiations.

She stated that she understood that the decision made tonight was not a final acceptance but she cautioned that in order for Republic Services to meet their deadline outlined in their bid proposal that a final decision would need to be made as soon as possible.

There were no other Public Comments.

RECESS

Chairman Wesson recessed the meeting until Tuesday, March 10, 2015 at 12:00pm. The Board will meet for a luncheon at the Cooperative Extension Building located at 104 Dundee Street in Windsor.

The Board will then meet with NET staff from 2:00PM-4:00PM to hear a report regarding finances and call volume inside the Commissioners Room located 106 Dundee Street in Windsor.

Ronald D. Wesson, Chairman

Sarah S. Tinkham, Clerk to the Board